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AMONG THE FAIRIES

BY

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(HON. AUGUSTA BETHELL),

AUTHOR OF 'ECHOES OF AN OLD BELL,' 'FEATHERS AND FAIRIES,' 'HELEN IN SWITZERLAND,' ETC.

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TO THE LITTLE AUNTS

SYLVIA AND DOLLY.

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AMONG THE FAIRIES.

RUBY.

WHEN the fairies still dwelt on the earth, there once lived an ancient woman. She was so old that no one living could remember her ever having been any younger than she now seemed, and yet she never grew any older; was never ill; and day after day she might be seen in the forest picking herbs and grubbing roots.

Indeed, so ac-

customed were the inhabitants of the little village to the sight of the old creature, that she attracted very little attention. Some may have looked upon her as a witch, or as an old woman under an enchantment; but the generality did not think about her at all. Her hut was perched upon a mountain peak, of which the lower part was clad with pine trees. It was said that the summit of the range of mountains to which this peak belonged was sacred to the fairies, and that if any rash mortal should venture beyond a certain height, he would disappear and never be heard of again. One hot day in summer, two strangers—an old man and a little girl about twelve years old—were seen toiling up the steep mule-track leading to the aforesaid village. On reaching a shady spot of the road where some kind person had placed a seat, the old man halted, and said, 'Rue, I don't see this wonderful village, do you?'

'No, sir,' answered the little girl briskly; 'but, if you like, I will run to the top of the hill and look.'

'No, no, child, no running away, I know

what that means; stay here, and when I feel a little rested we will go on.'

Rue frowned, but said nothing. She was certainly not a pretty child, in spite of her regular features and beautiful eyes, for her complexion was of the deepest red, intensified by long exposure to the sun, and the hue of her long wavy hair could only be described as 'carrots.' Looked at in the sunlight, she had the appearance of being red-hot.

Ruby was the only child of very wealthy people, and, in consequence, all the fairies were invited to the christening, to bestow their various gifts and blessings on the wee baby.

Among others arrived Vulcan's great-great-granddaughter, Jewellia, queen of the precious stones, and being in a very bad temper because the Koh-i-noor, one of her favourite servants, had just fallen into mortal hands, she felt nothing but rage against the innocent little girl whose christening she was obliged to attend. Accordingly, when the fat little baby was brought in, she exclaimed, 'Ugh! you ugly little monster, my gift shall be that of *colour*, ha! ha! your hair and complexion shall be as red as a ruby!'

So saying, she vanished without waiting to say goodbye, and retired to her fairy palace in a very cross frame of mind; but her ill temper soon turned into remorse, and in a short time she was as enraged and put out with herself as she had before been with her goddaughter. So although unable to retract her words, she determined to mitigate the sentence; and accordingly, that same evening she ran down a moonbeam, and entering the nursery, whispered these words into the baby's ear—

'Red as a Ruby shall you be,
Until you find your way to me;
And I shall put it in your mind,
That unto me your way you 'll find.'

Jewellia's spell soon began to work. Little tufts of carmine hair began to grow on each side of the baby's face, and as she got older she became such an unmistakeable little fright that her parents took a great dislike to her, and, being heartless people, were easily persuaded by an old travelling magician to sell her to him, he being just then in want of an oddity. It was on one of their long expeditions that they arrived at the little village. There we will now return to them.

Rue looked a hot little object sitting in the broiling sun, with her flaming hair and ruby-coloured velvet-dress. Very wistfully did she eye the small piece of shade under which her master had made himself comfortable, and still more wistfully did she watch the bottle of milk and water that every now and then was conveyed to his lips. For she, too, was frightfully thirsty, and burning hot; but this seemed a very secondary matter in the old magician's eyes, as he neither offered to share his shade or his milk with her. Then out came his pipe, and he was preparing to smoke in comfort, when an old woman appeared on the scene, the very same old dame of whom mention has already been made. She stood for a moment or two with her arms akimbo surveying the pair of travellers, and at last exclaimed, in a cracked voice, 'Well, what do you call yourself, sir? A gentleman? I should think not! Nor even a man; for what gentleman or man would leave a poor little girl to broil in this sun while he himself was comfortable in the shade?'

The magician only shrugged his shoulders, saying, carelessly, 'Pray, don't trouble your-

self, my good woman, the child is used to, and indeed prefers, sun to shade.'

'Which way are you bound?' said the woman, turning suddenly to Rue, who pointed in silence to the north.

'Going to Caddio? Poor wee mite! My dear, if you ever want a friend remember that I live there, and shall always be at home to welcome you. And if I mistake not,' she continued to herself, 'it will not be long before you come.'

So saying, she vanished in the same extraordinary manner as she had appeared, leaving Ruby wondering apathetically what possible interest the old creature could have in her. Soon Faniss, so the magician was called, rose, stretched himself, pocketed his pipe, and the two proceeded silently on their way. The village now made its appearance, and Rue heaved a sigh of relief, for they had come a long way that day, and her little legs ached.

Faniss changed his manner of walking as soon as they came within sight of the huts. From an upright, alert old man, he became an infirm cripple, and, taking Rue's arm, slowly panted up the narrow street. Four women

were having a gossip, when their attention was attracted by the two travellers.

'Dear me, Anna Clotzen,' said the oldest and fattest of the four, 'do just look at these poor things. They must have come a long way. The old man looks half dead, and what an extraordinary-looking child!'

Seeing that they were the subject of remark, Faniss turned and said, 'Good people, will you tell me if this is Caddio? We were told that if we climbed the mountain, and came north, we should find it. My poor grandchild is so tired and hungry that I hope we have not come to the wrong place.'

By this time quite a small crowd had collected, and pity for the travellers was loudly expressed on all sides, while much curiosity about them was evinced by the women. The good folks offered beds and food, which Faniss accepted for the present. 'But,' said he, 'I intend to build myself a hut at once, and am come here for the purpose of setting up my business among you.'

'Business! what business?' was asked in whispers. 'He looks like a wizard! Don't have anything to do with him! Look how he

glares at poor Anna! He has the evil eye!' and so on, till at length, one by one, the villagers dropped off, leaving only Anna Clotzen, who, shrugging her shoulders, said, 'Never mind, if every one else refuses you a bed and a bit of supper I will take you in, let come what may.'

Faniss put on a humble dejected look, and said, 'What have I said or done that they should think evil of me? Come, Rue, my darling, let us go back the way we came, for instead of the simple hospitable people we expected to find, suspicion and black looks are all we get.'

'Nonsense, nonsense, good man,' said Anna, hastily. 'Come home with me and see my good man; he has been laid up with rheumatism since Christmas.'

'Perhaps I can do him some good,' said Faniss, looking warily into the good woman's face.

'No, no,' said Anna, quickly. 'No conjuring, mind that.'

'But, madam, I am a doctor; that, indeed, is the profession of which I spoke; and in gratitude for your kindness, I should be most

happy to do anything for your husband that lies in my power.'

This Faniss brought out most suavely, and so used was Rue to his different characters, that she felt no surprise when he announced himself as a doctor. It ended in their being established in Anna's cottage until the village hut-builder had erected a dwelling for them.

Rue enjoyed herself very much, as Faniss was on his best behaviour before Anna and her husband. She dreaded the time when they would be alone again; for besides being treated with cruelty and neglect, she was forced to take part in many secret magical experiments, and, though not naturally a timid child, she saw much that would almost have killed any one else.

At last their own hut was ready, and then all her old troubles began again. At night the fumes of Faniss' magical fires would ascend the chimney, and cause luminous appearances in the air, which were watched and commented upon by all the villagers, some even declaring that dark shapes could be seen flitting about in the different coloured lights, gesticulating, weeping, and tearing their hair before vanish-

ing into smoke. Thus, without being at all aware of it, Faniss got a bad name in the village before he had been there a month, and poor Ruby was shunned as something uncanny. Still, as nothing definite could be brought against them, they could not be turned out of the place.

One day Faniss called Ruby into his little den. 'Here, child,' said he, 'I wish for your assistance with the magical mirror.' Now this magical mirror was hated and feared by Rue. It was the custom of Faniss to place her in front of it, and to conjure up two dark shadows, who, standing behind her, laid their hands on her head until she became insensible. Then it was the delight of Faniss to ask her numerous questions, and to extract all her thoughts about him—to find out, in fact, all that was in her mind. Then, when she could tell no more, he would wake her, and punish her well. This day Ruby was more than usually alarmed, for she had meditated running away in search of the old woman who had appeared to them on the road. However, there was no disobeying Faniss, so she followed him into his room, and saw that the mystical fire was already lighted

in a tall iron tripod. It was changing colours rapidly, first blue, then red, green and yellow. In the centre was the piece of polished steel which formed the mirror. She glanced at it with a feeling of loathing, and Faniss, standing in the shadowy background, saw the glance, and smiled maliciously. He advanced, and the flames sprang up still higher, and were now dead white, causing even Rue to look of a pallid greenish hue instead of her usual brilliant colour.

She advanced, and silently placed herself in front of the tripod. The flames parted, and the poor child saw herself reflected in the steel mirror, saw also, hovering behind her, a dark form she well knew and hated. Her terror sharpened her wits; a sudden idea darted across her mind, and on Faniss turning his back for a moment, she started forward, and exerting all her strength, overturned the tripod. The flames were extinguished, and the room left in utter darkness.

Now was the time to escape—run, Rue, run! But, alas! in her fright she forgot the exact position of the door, and for some seconds she rushed madly to and fro, groping with her

hands along the wall. She heard Faniss stumbling across the room to catch her, but, fortunately, he fell over the tripod and hurt his foot, which gave her a little time, and before he was sufficiently recovered to continue the chase she had found the handle of the door and escaped from the room and from the house. When at length he could follow her she was nowhere to be seen, and so, returning to the house, Faniss was soon engaged in magical operations, hoping thereby to arrest the fugitive, for he had the greatest terror lest she should fall into the hands of the fairies, when all his power would be at an end.

Meanwhile Ruby ran on and on, keeping in sight a little white speck on the mountain side, which the old woman had pointed out as her abode.

All went well till she was within half a mile of her destination, when she suddenly felt as if cords were twined round her legs, which impeded all further progress. Then she knew that Faniss and his magic were at work, and she sank to the ground in despair. 'What shall I do!' she moaned; 'in a few moments his two messengers, Spark and Wave, will be

here, and then'—. At this moment she saw coming up the path, with a fagot of sticks, the very old woman whose assistance she was about to seek. Ruby uttered a cry of joy. 'Oh! help me, help me, good woman,' she screamed. To her great disappointment, however, the old hag continued to wend her way slowly up the hill without taking the slightest notice of her appeal, and the poor little girl could now see two bright specks in the distance flying towards her. Just as they came near enough for her to distinguish their features the old woman threw one of her sticks to Ruby. It stuck in the ground and grew rapidly, so that in a moment she found herself cased, as it were, in the very heart of a huge oak tree. When the spirits arrived they were amazed not to see Ruby.

'I certainly saw the child lying here. Do you mean to say that you did not see her, Wave?' said the Fire Spirit, in a hot quarrelsome voice.

'I don't mean to say anything about it, good Spark,' said Wave, frigidly. 'I think no time should be lost in idle talk. Action is required, not conversation.'

'Well, well,' said Spark; 'but do you mean to say that we can both act together without consulting? Now I think the best plan would be for me to stand here, while you climb the tree and inundate every hole or cranny in which she could be hidden. Quick, quick, Wave, you are wasting time!'

'My good, impetuous Spark, I cannot say I think your plan a good one,' said Wave, throwing a wet blanket, so to speak, over Spark's excitement, and completely quenching him.

'Surely you cannot imagine that the fairies, who must have aided the girl, would allow such things as holes and crannies to exist if she is inside? No, she is cased in as solidly as possible, if there at all. So you had best set fire to the wood, while I stand ready to put you out. It is fortunate that this is mortal, and not fairy ground, as she can hardly escape us here.'

You can imagine the feelings of Ruby as she listened to this conversation. She had given up all hopes of escape, when suddenly the tree began to sink into the ground, and in a

moment or two she was several yards beneath the surface of the earth, emerging presently close to the old woman's cottage, where she knocked loudly for admittance. For some moments no attention was paid to her appeal; but at length the door opened, apparently of itself, for the sole occupant of the large room into which she entered was a big black rabbit, squatting on the floor, engaged in the hopeless attempt of biting its own tail, which seemed even shorter than the ordinary run of rabbits' tails. Ruby entered quickly, shutting and securing the door, which was well supplied with bolts, and then proceeded to look round the hut in search of the old hag or a hiding-place. She could see neither; but, glancing out of a window, her mind was set at ease by seeing the two bright specks fading away in the distance, and after a little time she began to feel rather dull. The rabbit made no remark, as she fully expected, being a fairy rabbit, it would do, and she was tired of watching its monotonous chase after its tail. At last she spied a large manuscript book, and opening it found it contained the life of a rabbit, and, as she shrewdly suspected, of the

very rabbit she was confronting. It was entitled—

The Life of a Greedy Black Rabbit,

AS RELATED BY PUCK,

COURT POET TO THE QUEEN OF THE FAIRIES.

A LITTLE hare sits in the golden fern,
No ! 'tis a rabbit I mean ;
And a soft wind blows from the balmy south,
And sighs through the lindens green.
The autumn sun sinks in the golden west,
And tinges each cloud with red ;
The autumn leaves catch up the rosy tint,
As on to the ground they 're shed.

A sweet, balmy scent on the breeze is borne,
From what paradise can it come ?
Follow the soft little buzzing bee
To a bed of wild heather bloom.
A sad carol sounds in the evening sky,
What echo of heaven is here ?
A blackbird lamenting the loss of her young
That have flown from her tender care.

But little Black Rabbit he cocks his tail,
Which with soft white fur is lined,
What cares he for sights and sounds such as these
With such a plan in his mind !
The neighbouring farm has a garden wide,
The neighbouring hedge a gap,
And to this garden our Bunny would hie
For a good meal and a nap.

So, over the common, under the fern,
  Through the shed leaves dry and dead,
Across sandy roads of bright yellow sands,
  And hedges with moss overhead,
He scuttles along, and he frisks his tail
  As he thinks in his knowing pate,
'When Growler the dog has gone to his bed,
  I 'll be at the garden gate !'

'Tis a long way there, and the sky grows dark,
  But never a rap cares he,
As he trots along on his four little pads,
  And longs for his coming tea !
Ah !—a very greedy rabbit,
And—a *very* greedy rabbit,
  And a greedy rabbit was he ;
But he quickly got his punishment,
  As you very soon will see.

Under the cabbages softly he creeps,
  The cabbages moist and green,
And begins his meal with good appetite
  And haste—lest he should be seen.
He eats and eats for an hour or so,
  And then goes on as before ;
Then, yawning, he lays himself down to sleep,
  Never to wake any more !

The morning breaks, and the silvery grey
  Is changing to warmer hue ;
Wake up ! O wake up ! my Bunny black,
  Or it will be worse for you.
The sun slowly rises, and casts over all
  A cool mellow morning light ;
A little bird's first early warble is heard,
  As he sings to the passing night.

Far away—in the distance, a faint *moo -o*,
Proclaim that the cattle are there ;
And the dogs are barking, all wide awake,
And are roaming the farm-yard near.
Soon clink go the pails, and the milkmaid's voice
Is heard through the frosty air ;
And beating of mats by the front house-door,
Shows that the maids are astir.

But Bunny sleeps on in the cabbage-bed,
Beneath a huge cabbage green,
And his soft fur rises with every breath,
The jettiest fur ever seen.
He hears not a step on the garden-path ;
He heareth not Growler's trot ;
He hears not Growler's short yelp of delight,
When he arrives at the spot.

He dreams a sweet dream of his soft white wife,
And his little children four ;
He dreams he 's vowing he never will come
And eat cabbages any more.
He thinks that his little wife kisses his nose,
And says, 'Oh, my husband dear !
Too many, to-night, of those nasty green things
You have been eating, I fear.'

Just then a bad pain in his little black neck,
And then he knows nothing more.
But, see ! old Growler has carried him off,
As far as the kitchen door !

P.S.—I, Puck, caught his spirit before it flew away, and Queen Mab has ordered it to be punished by continually trying to bite its own tail, until a mortal will intercede with her in its behalf.

'Oh poor little thing,' cried Ruby, 'what a shame for so small a fault it should have so hard a punishment.—Bunny dear,' she continued, addressing the rabbit, 'Bunny!'

But the rabbit did not give her any encouragement, and went on with its monotonous employment.

Just then the door opened, and in came the old woman with her bundle of sticks. 'Oh, there you are, my dear,' said she. Rue was silent from amazement. How had she opened the bolted door?

'I thought you would have the sense to come here; and indeed it is lucky you did, for it is the only place within two miles where you would be safe. I did not follow you at once, for I wanted you to do what I very well see you have done, viz., to read the history and sad fate of this poor little rabbit. Perhaps on the journey you are to make through Fairyland you will meet with Queen Mab, and will intercede for him.'

'The journey I am to make through Fairyland?' repeated Ruby in surprise.

'Yes,' answered the old woman; 'did you not know that you have three fairy godmothers,—the

Queen of the Woods, the Queen of the Birds, and the Queen of the Precious Stones?' And thereupon she gave Ruby an account of her christening; of the evil gift Jewellia had given her, and of the only remedy for it.

'But,' objected Ruby, 'I don't mind my colour and red hair. Why should I take so much trouble and run into so many dangers for what is, after all, only a secondary matter to me?'

'My dear,' said the old woman gravely, 'think before you speak. It is not a secondary matter to you at all. When you leave this cottage where will you go? How will you live? How will you escape the spells of your old master Faniss? Who will take you in in your present costume and with your present looks?'

'Your are right,' said Ruby, 'but all you have just said only makes me more curious and anxious to know who you are, and why you are so kind to the miserable little outcast you have just described.'

'All that you will understand after you have made your journey, found Jewellia, and obtained the Black Rabbit's pardon from Mab.'

'Then I will set forth at once,' said Ruby, jumping up and running to the door; but she was stopped by a loud noise,—a boom! which sounded like four claps of thunder concentrated into one short clap. She thought the boiler had burst, or that an earthquake had taken place; but looking round, except that the room seemed darker, all was as usual. The rabbit continued twirling round and round, and the old woman was sitting by the dying fire, apparently half asleep. Ruby moved cautiously to the window and looked out. Suddenly, to her horror, she perceived the pale face of Faniss glowering in the darkness, and hovering round him were Wave and Spark. He was in the act of dropping some liquid into a metal basin, and this liquid, when stirred by Spark's finger, exploded, and another loud boom was heard, preceded by a flash of lightning. Then Ruby perceived he was trying to force an entrance into the cottage, and forgetting that it was magic ground, she ran to the now snoring old woman and shook her violently by the shoulder, screaming, 'Look! look! wake up! oh, wake up! Faniss is at the door!'

The old woman did not open her eyes, but

she chanted two or three verses of a song apparently in her sleep. Ruby felt constrained to sit down, and as she listened to the dreamy sounds, a drowsiness that she could not shake off fell upon her. She forgot Faniss and everything but the words she heard, mingled with the soft sound of the clattering of the rabbit's paws as he kept time to the air. These were the words that Ruby heard—

'Rest, my darling,
Sleep thy deepest,
Let not fear
Thy slumbers break;
Neither thunder
Nor the tempest,
Nor the moon
Shall thee awake.

Let no thought
Of sorrow fright thee,
Think not now
Of grief or pain;
Sleep as softly,
And as brightly,
As the sun on drops of rain.'

About the beginning of the second verse Ruby thought, 'What a sweet voice the old woman has!' but almost before the thought had passed through her mind she was fast asleep. She did not hear the remainder of the verse, did not see the old woman rise, or feel the

soft kiss that was impressed on her forehead, but remained totally unconscious of passing events until she awoke and found herself in quite a new scene.

A high vaulted cavern formed of some clear pale green stone, which hung in long spikes from the roof, and projected in rough blocks from the sides, making the whole appear like a beautiful cathedral formed of aquamarines. Columns of the same transparent stone supported the roof, and the floor was of the softest velvety grass, without a single daisy or buttercup to take off from the mass of green.

This was what Ruby awoke from her trance to see. There was no sound to be heard but the tinkle, tinkle of a little stream of clear water running through the centre of the cavern. She rose to survey her surroundings, and going behind the row of columns nearest her, perceived that the cavern was of immense size, for far away she could see column after column fading into the distance. There were no signs of any human or fairy beings, and Ruby wondered for what reason she had been placed in the cavern. Her sharp eyes soon caught sight of something bright and sparkling on the column

nearest her, and going closer she found it was a knob of diamonds. She uttered an exclamation of delight, and was about to examine it more closely, when she heard the following warning in a low soft voice :—

'Oh, stop not for rock,
Oh, stop not for stone,
For you Fairyland through
Must pass quite alone ;
And the sooner you start,
The sooner you 'll see
The Queen—then request her
To set Bunny free.'

Then a chorus joined in—

'Oh, take off your hat, and roll up your hair !
Fairyland 's a hard road to travel ;
Oh, take off your hat, and roll up your hair !
Fairyland 's a hard road to travel, I declare.'

A dead silence followed this strange effusion, and then Ruby, always a child of good sound common sense, proceeded to follow out the directions in the chorus, which she felt must apply to her. Off came the small velvet cap she wore, and then, having divided her hair into two parts, she was adroitly rolling it up into a little bundle on the top of her head, when a curious thing happened. In the column directly facing her appeared a picture of a winding staircase and a door with a diamond

handle. Curiosity caused her to look at the next column, where to her great horror she saw represented Faniss, walking briskly along a hard high-road, and to all appearance coming nearer and nearer. With a half-suppressed scream she sprang forward, opened the door with the precious handle, and was soon half-way up the staircase. It was a very long one, and she thought that the last step would never come. But it came at last, and she found herself where she least expected to be, namely, at the very top of the principal mountain above Caddio. Beneath her feet was a large circle of grass, and all round were great boulders of rock, and steep precipices with sharp jagged edges, so that she no longer wondered at the impossibility of any human being climbing to the summit,—'unless, indeed, they came up the same easy way that I did,' she thought. Just then a little commotion at her feet made her start, and looking she perceived that each blade of grass was laying itself down quite flat and smooth; so, fearing to disturb the operation, she moved on one side and seated herself on a stone to wait for the next adventure, which was not long in coming.

When the fairy ring was quite ready, and the moon had just risen, the fairies began to assemble on their favourite dancing ground. These little beings were very different in appearance. Two bright creatures, who had come spinning down one of the last rays of the sun, seemed formed out of a piece of the sunset; others from the moon were pale and languid, with silvery dresses; and some were little soft roundabouts, deposited by tiny clouds drifting by. Then clambering over the rock came twenty or thirty more from the various flowers growing there, such as the bright rock cistus, the mountain rose, the blue veronica, the white eyebright, and many others. Finally, out of holes and crannies sprang other fairies representing different metals and precious stones; and now Ruby kept a sharp look-out for the Queen, her godmother. No one appeared to notice her, however, but all chattered and laughed together, the ladies gossiping and criticising the dresses, and the gentlemen quarrelling over Fairyland politics and flirting with the ladies, behaving, in fact. very much as we mortals do.

A dance began, and Ruby was much amused

by watching the different antics that went on, until all of a sudden the proceedings were stopped by a round ball rolling into the centre of the fairy ring. Uncurling itself, it disclosed the figure of Puck, who, standing up, made the following speech :—

'In Queen Mab's Court, not long ago,
I heard a whisper passing,
That soon a thing should come to *pass*,
All other things sur*pass*ing.
Come to a pretty *pass* are things,
And now 'tis I who say so,
If fairy things, with fairy wings,
Can *pass* a mortal by so.
Are eyes then blind, and noses dead,
And ears without their hearing,
If by that rock you cannot see
A mortal now appearing?'

There was a sudden movement of surprise among the fairies, and all eyes were turned towards Ruby, who felt very uncomfortable. It was strange how one wave of Puck's hand and a few words had opened their eyes. Puck laughed, and turning to Ruby, addressed her in prose,—apparently, he thought, a mortal could not understand rhyme.

'Do not be afraid, little girl. We are all friends here.'

'I am not afraid,' said Ruby indignantly;

for after the dreadful visions she had been in the habit of seeing in the magical glass, she was inclined to regard fairies in the light of pretty little playthings.

Puck then delivered a long message from Queen Mab to the small crowd of fairies, in which they were commanded to pay every attention to Ruby, and to help her as far as they were able through the numerous dangers and difficulties of her path; at the same time, to avoid giving such help as might cause her to distrust her own brains, which were quite sharp enough to conquer ordinary difficulties. Then, stepping forward, one of the little ladies chanted—

'Her Majesty's will
Is, and shall still
Be the very first thought of us all;
She has only to say,
And I 'm sure every fay,
Will then hasten to answer her call.'

At this there was a faint buzz of approval. Then said Puck, 'No time to be lost, my dear! You must now plan your route, change your skin, and be off.'

'Change my skin?' repeated Ruby.

'Well, not literally; that is a quotation from

a fairy book, which naturally you do not understand. I merely meant that you cannot expect to pass through our doorways or associate with our people when you are such a giantess. Therefore you had better argue out for yourself the way to the "Diminishing Falls," where by drinking the water you will become a proper size. But to reach them you must pass through one of her Gracious Majesty's provinces. There are four—Featherland, Flowerland, Jewelland, and Sparkland, so choose—'

'I—I don't know,' stammered poor bewildered Ruby. 'Does it matter which I choose? Is there any difference?'

Puck's reply was—

'Featherland is soft,
Flowerland is light,
Jewelland is hard,
Sparkland is bright.'

Ruby made a dash at the first.

'Oh, I 'll go to Featherland.'

As she spoke two or three small creatures separated themselves from the rest and stood before her. She perceived they were dressed in feathers of different colours, and held wands of varied hues, chiefly composed of feathers from the peacock's tail.

Then a soft little voice sang—

'In danger, utter but this rhyme,
And we will help you in good time.
"Feather fairies floating near,
Out of reach of mortal ear;
Eagle, magpie, chaffinch—all
Quickly answer mortal call."'

Ruby repeated the verse over and over, and when she had at last learnt it by heart she perceived that every fairy had disappeared, and that she was again alone on the mountain top.

She remembered Puck's peculiar expression, '*Argue* out the way to the Diminishing Falls;' and as she sat there on the rock she took his words literally, and began: 'The Diminishing Falls. Well, if they diminish they must be in the distance, because things always diminish as they get further away; and as I am at the top of all things, I cannot get any higher, so I must go *down*. The question is, Which side down—to the left or to the right?' Here she stopped, puzzled, for, on looking round, neither side seemed possible to descend. 'Well, I hope I shall go *right*,' she at last said, and then her words struck her as prophetic. 'Of course—yes, I *must* go *right*, if I can;' and, rising, she

looked down the precipice, determined not to be daunted by what she saw. It was very steep, certainly; but there were great cracks and fissures in which a foot could easily be placed. So, turning her back to the black chasm, she began to descend, and, after many slips and frights, found herself at length safely landed on a small ledge of rock, on which it was possible to sit and rest for a while. Then, seeing that the ledge continued for some distance, she walked to the end, and came upon some falls of pale green water dashing down a chasm. Stooping, she drank a handful of water. She did not feel any difference in herself, but every surrounding object seemed of enormous size. A small dead leaf lying by her side now had the appearance of an enormous sheet of crumpled brown paper, and the small waterfall grew into a Niagara. Every little crack was a great chasm; and great was her fright when a large creature flew by, which, however, in reality was nothing more or less than a common fly.

The small holes and crannies in the rocks now quite changed their appearance; and Ruby perceived, to her surprise, that she was walk-

ing on a kind of terrace in front of a sombre-looking palace with long passages, windows, and doors,—one thing being remarkable, that it seemed quite dark inside. Boldly entering the first of these passages, she walked for some time in semi-darkness, till suddenly her path was arrested by a huge green frog, with a lantern fixed on a pole in his hand.

'Your passport? The password? Your country? Your Queen?'

'Kind frog, will you tell me the way to Featherland?' said Ruby; 'I am very tired, and—'

'Your passport?' demanded the frog.

'But, really,' continued Ruby coaxingly, 'I—'

'The password?' cried the frog.

'Well, wait a minute,' said Ruby impatiently. 'You don't give one time to—'

'Your country?' shouted the frog.

Ruby began to get rather frightened, but, thinking the only way was to conciliate her enemy, she began anew, 'Good frog—'

'Your Queen?' screamed the frog, and this time he shouted so loudly that Ruby was quite frightened, and said to herself, 'Perhaps he

does not understand prose. I wonder if I could talk to him in rhyme, and she began—

'Oh, Froggy dear, just listen
To what I 'm going to say,
I want to get to Featherland,
And fear I 've lost my way.'

'Why couldn't you say so before?' said the frog gruffly; and, taking hold of her with his flabby feet, he dragged her into a cavern, where frogs of all hues and sizes were squatting or hopping about the wet floor.

When her errand was known, it appeared she could not have gone to a better place, for the Frog Queen had one of the keys of Featherland; the other key being kept by Queen Hummingbird, the Vice-regent of Featherland. The fairies could, of course, fly over the gates; but anything in the shape of a mortal was obliged to beg admission from one of these ladies. It was usually a long and difficult process to get into the good graces of the Queen, as she was terribly suspicious; but Ruby found favour at once, perhaps on account of her extraordinary colour,—for frogs are proverbially capricious,—and very soon she was standing inside the small golden gate that formed the

entrance to Featherland. Here a new and strange sight met her eye.

Everything was soft and feathery. The hills could only be compared to blue and violet down, the branches of the trees to long ostrich plumes, which, as they moved to and fro peacefully in the breeze, made little noise, but a soft 'swish, swish.'

Presently Ruby came to a small house built entirely of pheasants' feathers, the door being composed of the beautiful golden feathers which form the cock's breast. She tried to knock, but could make no sound on the soft surface, so she shook the door instead, and then, no notice being taken, opened it and walked in. A little table was spread in the most inviting manner, with a hot dinner. Ruby felt very hungry, and something told her the food was meant for her; so, after waiting a few moments for politeness' sake, she sat down, and before long very little was left but the dishes and covers. Then she began to wish she could see some one who would tell her the quickest way to the end of her journey, and thereupon she jumped up, and, leaving the little house, wandered off anew.

For a long way this wonderful land seemed quite deserted. On all sides was the same beautiful scenery, and the same strange stillness. One would have thought that in Featherland a bird, at least, would have been seen; but no, and not a pipe or whistle could be heard. Ruby had some idea of retracing her steps and making further inquiries of the Frog Queen, when, turning a corner suddenly, she came upon a number of little people lying on the ground in different positions, all fast asleep.

Ruby coughed and stamped, in hopes that one or other would awake, but in vain; and at last, getting quite angry, she took hold of the nearest mannikin and shook him violently. Great was her surprise when, on opening his eyes, he suddenly changed into a robin!

'Ah! you have caught me napping, so I am your prisoner, you funny little red girl; but don't be very hard on me, for I am only a harmless robin. I will do anything you like; but don't, oh don't,'—here he trembled all over, and flapped his wings piteously,—'*don't* give me up to the enemy.'

'Poor little thing!' said Ruby, 'what do you mean? I don't want to make you my pri-

soner, and as for the enemy I know nothing about it.'

'Don't talk about it,' said the robin, looking nervously over its shoulder. 'We often notice that it appears when it is talked of.'

'You shall go in one moment,' said Ruby; 'but, please, answer one or two questions first. Which is the way to Queen Mab's Court? and why are you all asleep?'

'Queen Mab's Court,' answered the robin, 'is far from here, and very difficult for a mortal to find, for the Ogres' Wood and the Mermaids' Lake must be crossed before you reach Sparkland. When once you have crossed Sparkland borders you will be safe, for it is a friendly nation, and I will give you a passport; but I am sadly afraid you will come to grief among the ogres and mermaids,—unless, indeed, you are very careful and prudent, and will follow out strictly two or three rules that I will give you. And now for your other question. Feather fairies sleep three months of every year,—not every night, as you mortals do, and this is the last day of the third month. Now, come with me,' and away he hopped, Ruby following.

The robin led the way to a wall composed of swan's down, and opening a little door in the side, showed her a grass walk leading apparently to a large forest. 'While walking through the wood remember these four things,' said the robin: 'Always turn to your left when two turnings come; never utter a word to any one, unless the word "Frizzlewig" is first said to you; don't help any one in distress, however unkind it may seem; lastly, if you are in any great and immediate danger, call out these words, "Robbin a bobbin a bilberry ben."'

Ruby promised obedience, and giving the fairy bird a parting kiss, passed through the doorway, and very soon had left Featherland far behind her. The forest seemed very gloomy after the rosy brightness of the feathers, nevertheless she trotted along bravely, and soon became accustomed to the darkness. At first she thought most carefully over her rules, but as time went on and nothing happened she began to think Robin had been over cautious, and that in reality there was no danger at all.

Presently she heard a faint moaning sound on one side of the path, and looking down per-

ceived a little white puppy that had caught its foot in a trap and was looking up at her most piteously, 'Oh you poor little darling!' cried Ruby, and stooping down she was about to unfasten the trap when the warning 'Do not help any one in distress,' darted into her mind; she started back and was going on her way when the little dog gave such a heartrending cry she could not resist stopping to pat it. Of course every moment of delay made matters worse, for the little puppy wagged its tail, and licked her hand, and was altogether such a fascinating little dog, that at last pity won the day, and she was in the act of unfastening the trap when she was startled by a half-stifled laugh of triumph, and looking up fancied she saw a glistening eye looking through the bushes at her. Snap went the trap and off rushed Ruby as hard as she could, so fast indeed that she did not notice a very small turning to the left. On she went, and all seemed going well when suddenly appeared a nice little girl riding a white pony. She stopped on meeting Ruby and said, 'Oh, Robin told me you would come this way, and so I have come to meet you, to ask you to stop and rest in my little summer bower

close by.' As she spoke she pointed with her riding-whip through the branches, and Ruby saw a pretty rose-covered abode a few yards off. 'No,' thought she, 'I am not going to be taken in again. I should be foolish if I could not remember that I must hear "Frizzlewig" before I answer any one.' And she pushed on in silence. The little girl rode after her complaining of her rudeness, and at length placing herself and her pony between Ruby and the road screamed out, 'Now, will you answer me or will you not?' Ruby shook her head but began to feel rather frightened. The little girl gave a loud hiss, and to Ruby's horror changed into the most frightful old woman imaginable, who clutched at her with claw-like hands, and was just carrying her off when Ruby remembering Robin's words, screamed out, 'Robbin a bobbin a bilberry ben!' In a moment thousands of crows and ravens darkened the air and pecked furiously at the old witch till she released Ruby. Then a voice said, 'Run back to the turning to the left, which you missed.' Ruby immediately obeyed, turned the corner, and was in comparative safety. Nothing of importance happened during the remainder of the journey,

for that little incident had made her cautious; she heeded neither shrieks nor groans, and took especial care to look out for all the left-hand paths, and very soon she arrived on the borders of a large lake, which she guessed rightly to be the home of the Mermaids. Yes! it was the Enchanted Lake, and Ruby, as she wandered on the golden sands in the brilliant sunshine, thought she had never seen a prettier sight. Floating on the deep blue water were several little sailing boats, now and then accosting one another, now and then lowering their white sails, or anchoring under the lee of some lovely islet, yet, strange to say, not one of these boats was manned by a sailor.

Presently in a bend of the shore Ruby came upon a little old man dragging a small truck laden with barrels. She stopped, and asked where he was going. 'Taking fresh water to Sparkland,' he said; 'it's seldom I can get it, but to-day all the mermaids are at the regatta. Don't you tell them you saw me, will you?' he added anxiously, 'for if they knew that a Sparklander had been seen again stealing lake-water they would complain to Queen Mab, and then there *would* be a pretty state of things!'

Ruby reassured him; for she really felt no interest in the Sparklanders, and then inquired the best way of crossing the lake. He shrugged his shoulders, and said, 'Some say one, and some say the other, but I think they are all worst, and none best. There's the ferry, and there's the boat, and then there's swimming, but I should advise you not to cross at all.' And with this he disappeared through a hole in the wall, dragging his truck of barrels after him.

At that moment Ruby's attention, and indeed every sense, was attracted by the most exquisite singing she had ever heard. It seemed to come across the water, and rose and fell with every little breath of air. It sounded to Ruby like a description of the most lovely scenery ever seen or heard of. It seemed to describe the scented air, the lovely flowers and fruits, and soft subdued light of a place where everything was pale delicate blue and shimmering silver,—a kind of drowsy, dreamy place where you remembered nothing that was disagreeable, and only saw the most lovely faces and heard the most beautiful songs. Entranced by the melodious sounds, half unconsciously she drew nearer and nearer to the water's edge,

and even walked into the lake. The water rippled round her, but she was not conscious of it. Neither did she see that all the fairy boats were gathering together in order to approach her. She heard, saw, and felt nothing but that exquisite voice and that lovely place. Suddenly the singing ceased, and then Ruby felt the water close over her head, heard it bubbling and singing in her ears, and then for some time remembered nothing more. When she came to herself she seemed to be in just such a place as the song had described,—everything was of a pale blue green colour, with here and there ripples and darts of silver light. Bending over her was a most beautiful face, shadowed by a veil of golden hair. As Ruby opened her eyes the bright vision spoke, and the voice sounded like the voice of the song—

'At last you have wakened, and now can I see
That again those deep blue eyes are looking at me.
Oh child of a mortal ! what wonderful charm
Do you use that can keep you from Fairylake harm ?
I sang for your death, but the moment I saw
That golden-crowned head, the waters close o'er,
My siren song faltered ere sealed was your fate,
Here I trembling hastened, lest I was too late,
Lest my sister should get you, and before I could say,
Should have killed and then eaten you just where you lay.'

Ruby shuddered, not feeling yet quite her-

self again. She sat up, and asked the mermaid what her name was.

'Finda-lo-lo,' answered she, 'which in mermaid language means "Golden Ripple."'

'Well, Finda,' said Ruby, 'I am very much obliged to you for not letting your sisters eat me, and I should be still more obliged if you will tell me how to get to Queen Mab's court, as I am in a great hurry.' Finda-lo-lo looked very sad, and two tears trickled down her lovely pale cheeks as she said—

'Oh, go not and leave me,
All lonely to sigh,
For if thou dost leave me,
To thee I must fly.
And if water she leaves,
Then thy Finda will die.'

And the poor little mermaid buried her face in her long golden hair, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

'What can I do?' thought Ruby, who, though very sorry for Finda, did not feel quite the same amount of enthusiasm. 'Listen, Finda-lo-lo, there is little good in crying; look up and tell me what I am to do. Of course I do not wish to leave you, but still, you know, there is the black rabbit to be thought of.' But

Finda sobbed on, saying between her sobs, 'You l-like the b-b-black rabbit better than me!'

'No, Finda, I do not,' answered Ruby; 'if you would only show me the way out of this place I should like you *much* better.'

'Would you really?' cried Finda, forgetting poetry in her excitement. 'Then this is what you must do. Ask Queen Mab to give me a pair of feet instead of a tail, and then I shall be able to come with you, and to be with you always.' To this Ruby agreed, though, perhaps, not over cordially, and, leading the way, Finda led her through some wonderful sights. Great fish and small fish were swimming about among perfect palaces of white and red coral. Coloured sea-weed, in the form of great trees, waved overhead, while underfoot was a carpet of golden sands, thickly strewn with tiny pink and purple shells. Soon Finda-lo-lo exclaimed, 'Here we are! Now, wait a moment,' and taking Ruby's hand, her eyes fixed on her face, she began to sing—

'Ripple, ripple, waters blue,
On thy surface flowers strew,
Floating, floating with the stream,
Precious jewels now they seem.

Splashing, splashing, little waves,
Give the dewdrop each one craves.
Sparkling, sparkling, drops of dew,
Tears of diamond in eyes of blue.
Rocking, rocking on its breast,
Flowers upon the lake at rest.'

As she sang, an enchanted stupor again stole over Ruby. She could feel and hear nothing but Finda's lovely voice, and see nothing but the shining lake waters strewn with the most lovely flowers. Suddenly she awoke from her trance to find herself on the shore, with Finda close to her. 'You have now only to walk straight on to the Forget-me-not Gate. Ruby, don't forget me. I fear you will, but I cannot stay, this air is too much for me. Good-bye, my heart's own.' So saying, the poor little mermaid sank gradually back into the cool waters, keeping Ruby chained to the spot by singing faintly as she disappeared from sight—

'Remember! but, alas! you will forget
The day, the hour, the place e'en where we met.
Remember—yes! Forget me not, my love,
But send me soon a call from earth above.
Remember, and forget me not,
Remember—remember—'

Over and over again there echoed 'Remember,' then all was quiet, and Ruby was once

more left to herself. She looked round, and far away in the distance could see tall silver spires gleaming, each with a huge sapphire at the top. Ruby, being of a fanciful turn of mind, compared the spikes with their blue stones to a tuft of huge harebells.

As she approached the city, she looked in vain for any chief entrance among the rose-wreathed arches leading apparently into a maze of flower walks, which surrounded the city instead of walls. Ruby, advancing to one of the numerous fairies who were flitting to and fro, called, 'May I go in through these arches, or is it private?' She received no answer, however—indeed, the fairies did not even seem to perceive her. After walking about for a short time, she came suddenly upon a placard printed in letters of gold—

'To strangers who attempt to pass these gates,
I do address these words,
Lest they should enter, and then share the fate
Of many gone before.
Invisible—though either man or maid—
To fairies shall you be,
Until, by hazard unto fairy aid,
You come, and then—you 'll see!

On reading these lines, Ruby at once perceived what was required of her; but she

thought it rather aggravating, after coming such a long way, only to find a new difficulty. Walking through an archway, she found herself in a kind of bazaar. There were stalls on all sides,—one heaped with nuts, another with sugar-plums, another with gloves, and so on. But there were inscriptions over each stall, which proved that they were not ordinary nuts, gloves, or sugar-plums. For over the nuts was written, 'Who tastes of me becomes invisible;' over the sugar-plums, 'I kill;' and over the gloves, 'Put me on and you will be as strong as a lion.' Believing that these things were for her use, Ruby did not hesitate to take some of each and put them in her pocket, excepting the gloves, which she at once drew on to her hands. Then she walked on, peering about anxiously in search of any fairy in distress, but such a thing seemed absurd, for everybody she met was as happy and quiet as possible. Presently, however, she turned a corner, and found she was again on the borders of a city, only upon a different side. Fronting her was a dark forest, and from it issued a sound as of some one crying. Ruby rushed forward, and after a short search perceived a little fay in a pink dress

chained to a tree, her hair dishevelled, and her wand broken in two. 'What is the matter, you poor little thing?' asked Ruby; but the fairy neither saw nor heard her, and continued to sob and struggle. At that moment Ruby saw a hut at a little distance, and advancing cautiously she peered in, only to shrink back with a cry of horror, for by the flickering light of the fire she had seen two objects which filled her with fear and trembling. These were a tall iron tripod, and a mirror with its face turned to the wall. There was no one in the hut, but pure imagination made her see the well-known phantom forms rising round her, and whispering horrible words into her ears.

A faintness stole over her, and she sank to the ground, forgetful alike of the fairy and of her own danger in remaining there. She sat on in a kind of stupor for some minutes, until aroused by something climbing into her lap, and looking down she saw a tiny black rabbit gazing up at her piteously, as though it would say, 'Please get up and run away.' Then it all flashed upon her, and rising she tried to think what she ought to do. But her thoughts would wander. It was like a hideous nightmare. She could

only think, 'Faniss is here! Faniss is here!' and when she saw the well-known wicked-looking face peering at her out of a bush, she was not at all surprised. Still, although he seemed to be looking straight at her, he yet did not appear to see her, for after a moment or two, during which time Ruby stood perfectly rigid with fear, he came from behind the bush, and approached the little fay, who began screaming violently and calling for help. Then Ruby remembered her mission, and her gloves, and rushing up to Faniss, was just in time to see him draw out a huge knife and begin to sharpen it on a stone. Realising by this time that she was invisible, and feeling a wonderful strength in her hands, still clad in the magic gloves, she twisted the cord round Faniss, binding his hands and feet securely. Frightful yells now rent the air, but, nothing daunted, Ruby at once proceeded to set free the little pink fairy, and no sooner was this done than the small creature's eyes were opened, and she perceived the little red oddity who was standing by her.

'You are Ruby Diamonda, I am sure?' she said. 'We have been expecting you for a long time, indeed her Majesty was beginning to

give you up in despair. Lady Jewellia, your godmother, is afraid lest she should die with the remorse of having spoilt your life upon her conscience, and Queen Mab is afraid that the poor black rabbit will never be set free. However, here you are, and better late than never. Before we pass the city gate, where I shall have to talk poetry, let me thank you for getting into trouble so that you might set me free, for if you had not come this way and found me, you would have wandered about probably for three or four years. It is so seldom that a fairy gets into trouble.'

As she spoke they passed beneath the flower arches, and very soon Ruby found herself in a street paved with beautiful coloured marble, with houses of silver. A flight of magnificent golden steps led to the Queen's palace, and while mounting Ruby conned over in her mind what she should say to her Majesty about herself, Faniss, and the black rabbit. She had plenty of time for deliberation, as it appeared that Queen Mab was holding a court for listening to appeals, and as every one went in in alphabetical order, she, Ruby, would be one of the last. She took her seat in a large anteroom

among a crowd of fairies, young and old, as well as animals of all kinds, each of which had some complaint or petition to make to their beloved Queen. A horrible-looking old person in yellow, with a complexion that matched her dress, was her neighbour, and as Ruby made herself as comfortable as she could on a rather hard bench, this creature turned and said sharply—

'Pray what is your letter?'

'R,' replied Ruby, concluding she was asking for her initial.

'Ugh,' growled the old hag, giving her a dig with her sharp elbow. 'Another half-hour for me to wait! My name is Saffron, so of course, though one of the oldest and most celebrated of the fairies, and with the most important commission, I am kept to the last.'

'What is your commission?' asked Ruby in a conciliating manner, hoping thus to soothe her jaundiced neighbour. Saffron cast down her eyes, and Ruby thought she was trying to call up a blush.

'You must know,' she said, 'that we fairies are never allowed to marry any one but our own countrymen, unless we can get a written

permission from Queen Mab. Now, I—I' (affectedly) 'have received an offer from a gentleman who is not one of her Majesty's subjects, and I am here to obtain her permission for the match.'

'What is the gentleman's name?' asked Ruby, more for the sake of saying something than from real curiosity, for she did not care two straws who he was. Her surprise, however, was great when Saffron murmured bashfully—

'Magician Faniss.'

'Faniss!' exclaimed Ruby, horrified—'*never!*'

'And why pray *never*, Miss?' indignantly demanded Saffron, rising from her seat and facing Ruby.

'Oh, well, you are *quite* welcome to him, I am sure,' Ruby hastened to remark, 'and I daresay he will suit you very nicely,' she added, as her eyes fell on Saffron's malignant expression and her obstinate mouth and chin. At this moment the curtains that guarded the entrance to the chamber of state were drawn back, and Puck appeared dressed in a pale blue livery. He called out 'Ruby,' and with a beating heart Ruby approached him and passed into the next chamber. To her surprise it was almost dark, or seemed so at first; a faint blue

light pervaded everything, but something glistened in the distance, which proved to be Queen Mab's throne. It was formed of one solid block of silver, and upon it was seated her Majesty with a long diamond wand in her hand, and a diamond crown on her head.

Among the court ladies around her was one who, directly Ruby entered the room, hid her face in her hands, and drew behind the shadow of the throne. Our heroine advanced, made a deep reverence as she passed in front of the throne, and then a soft voice addressed her thus :—'Well done, brave little girl, you have found your way here in safety; and now, as I promised, I am ready to grant any requests you may make, and to introduce you to your godmother, my sister Jewellia.'

Queen Mab paused, and Ruby concluded it was her turn to speak, so she said, 'I am most grateful to your Majesty for all your kindness; and if your Majesty will allow me a few minutes to think I will make my requests, and not detain your Majesty any longer.'

'Then call in the next on the list, Puck,' said Queen Mab, 'the next, and the last, I believe.'

Then Saffron was ushered in simpering, and, making her curtsey, she began as follows :—

'A spinster for fifty long years have I been,
And now I 've an offer of marriage,
The difficulty being, most worshipful Queen
(Not wishing your power to disparage),
That he whom I love is a mortal magician,
And a subject of yours will not be,
And so that I cannot without your permission,
Be easily united to he.'

'His name, my good Saffron, his name?' asked the Queen.

'It is not so great as his fame,
Flam Flambersnatch Angerberiss
Flick Flackerlock Panderby Faniss.'

Queen Mab turned to Ruby: 'Faniss! why that is the name of your old master, is it not?'

'Yes,' answered Ruby, 'and I do not know how he will marry Saffron, for I left him tied up in the wood.'

'Well, I wanted to find a suitable punishment for all his cruelty to you, and I think nothing could be worse than a marriage with Saffron,' said the Queen, laughing; and turning to Saffron, she said—

'I grant my permission :
Marry your magician ;
But on this condition,
Should you, either of you, show your faces again
Within the walls or the borders of our royal domain,
On that day and that hour, whenever it be,
You 'll be chained side by side to an old olive tree.'

Saffron gave a little affected shriek, and prepared to go into hysterics, but Puck took her by the shoulders and turned her out of the chamber.

Then Ruby plucked up her courage and said, 'I have two requests to make to your Majesty. Will you pardon the little black rabbit, and give Finda-lo-lo a pair of feet?'

'I will grant your first-named request,' said the Queen; 'but believe me the second would be unkindness, and not kindness, to Finda-lo-lo; you cannot change a mermaid's nature, which is fickleness itself. She would very soon long to have her tail back again, and to return to her native element. By this time she has completely forgotten you, so believe me it is better to leave her where she is.'

Ruby was bound to believe that Queen Mab knew better than she did; but it was not without a heavy sigh of regret that she abandoned her promise to the mermaid. At that moment Puck came forward, and announced the arrival of the black rabbit, and opening the door in scuttled the little fellow in such a state of delight that he could not keep still for a moment, but danced about on his hind-legs,

and then raced round and round the room as hard as he could go, making occasional dives at Puck's legs, and, shocking to relate, scarcely respecting those of Majesty. The Queen laughed very much, and calling him to her stroked his soft fur and pulled his silky ears. The rabbit, however, would not stay on her lap, but jumped off, and ran up to the old woman of the hill, who, unnoticed, had followed him into the state chamber. She spoke not, but looked wistfully at the Queen, who smiled and waved her wand; when lo! instead of one rabbit there were now two frisking about, and the second was the most beautiful little white rabbit ever seen.

'I changed his little white wife into an old woman,' explained Queen Mab, 'so that she might help to free her husband. Look how pleased they are; but they will not be quite happy until they get back to their own little hole,—so let them out, Puck.'

The little rabbits squeaked and hopped and kissed each other's noses, and finally trotted out. Ruby fancied she heard the black rabbit whisper to his wife, 'I never will eat cabbages any more.'

As soon as they were gone, Queen Mab exclaimed, 'Jewellia!' and the fairy who had hidden her face in her hands when Ruby entered came forward. Her dress was entirely composed of sapphires, which shone with a clear bright light, more like the sky in summer than anything else. Her shoes and wand and crown were composed of deep-hued rubies.

'All that remains to be done,' said Queen Mab, 'is to give Ruby her natural colour, and to ask her which she will choose for the future,—life in Fairyland, or life in Mortalland.'

'Oh, let me be a fairy!' cried Ruby, 'and live with you, great Queen.'

'So be it. I place her under your care, Jewellia; she shall keep her original name, and rule over Rubyland. That part of your kingdom you must forfeit as punishment for your conduct to the poor child.'

The Queen waved her wand and a mirror appeared, in which Ruby saw herself reflected as a pretty little girl with a lovely complexion and golden hair, while her dress, and the wand in her hand, were entirely composed of the stones whose name she bore. She uttered an exclamation of delight, and throwing herself

before the Queen, kissed her hand in token of allegiance.

Then said Puck, 'Allow me, most gracious Queen, to wind up this scene by reciting my last piece of poetry, which contains a description of your most serene Majesty, and which every one of your faithful subjects will acknowledge to be truth itself.' And he commenced—

'Blue, blue eyes, like a violet
In the morning, when the dew
Leaves on its petals a sparkling
Like diamonds, and the blue
In its depths seems all the deeper
For the contrast of the two.

Bright, red-brown hair, like a chestnut
Which has been covered by fays
With a web of golden streakings,
Like sunbeams on stormy days.
Eyes with a witching sparkle,
That twink like the morning star,
Or gaze with a dewy brightness
Into the distance far.
Hair which, when she is throned
Upon her mushroom seat,
Lies on the ground around her,
Behind her, beneath her feet.
Lips'—

'Enough, enough, good Puck,' interrupted the Queen, rising from her throne, 'a truce to compliments. What we desire is not admiration but love from each faithful subject.—The court is dismissed.'

THE SLIPPERY MOUNTAIN.

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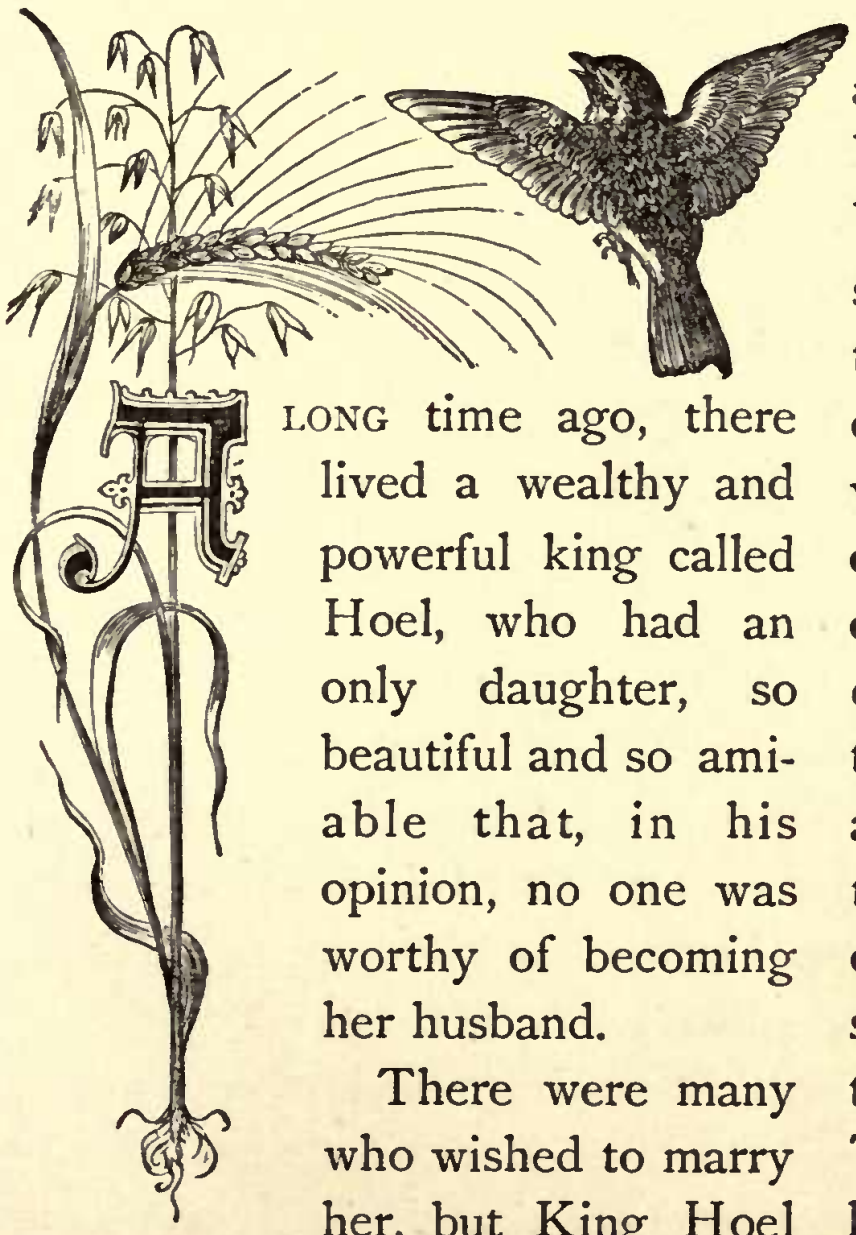

LONG time ago, there lived a wealthy and powerful king called Hoel, who had an only daughter, so beautiful and so amiable that, in his opinion, no one was worthy of becoming her husband.

There were many who wished to marry her, but King Hoel invariably forbade the banns, sending the suitors away with this or that objection; one was too poor, another too ugly, or too short, or too tall. The poor king at

length grew tired of inventing objections, so he gave out that the first person, whether he were rich or poor, young or old, handsome or ugly, tall or short, who should be able to carry his daughter from the bottom to the top of the high mountain at the foot of which his palace was built should have her for his wife.

Banishment from the kingdom was to be the penalty paid for failure.

'Now,' thought King Hoel, with a sly chuckle, rubbing his hands with satisfaction, 'I have settled the matter nicely. It is quite impossible for any one to climb the mountain, and I shall not lose my child.'

The mountain was, indeed, of unusual height, and as slippery as glass. Who could possibly perform such a wonderful feat as to carry the Princess to the top?

'Oh dear!' sighed the Princess Florentina, as she gazed at it out of a back window of the palace, 'no one will ever be able to carry me to the top! Oh dear! oh dear! how can papa be so silly?'

There were, however, no lack of enterprising suitors anxious and willing to attempt the feat; and the very next morning the Princess was in-

formed that a gentleman was waiting downstairs for the purpose, and that he would be very much obliged if she would attire herself in the thinnest garments she possessed, and would forget to put any pomatum on her hair, so as to decrease her weight as much as possible.

'Wait a moment,' said the Princess, and a cunning expression was in her eyes; 'I'll have a look at the gentleman before obeying his wishes.' So she ran downstairs, and entering a state-room, saw a hideous little monster with a hump on his back, and eyes as green as grass.

'Are you ready, Princess?' he exclaimed, in a gruff, ugly voice.

'No. No-o-o-o,' shrieked Florentina. 'Go away, you dreadful creature. You shall *not* carry me up the mountain. I won't let you try.'

'Hush, hush, silly child,' said the King, 'there is no cause for alarm. He won't have breath enough to get halfway up! Remember I have passed my word that *whoever* comes shall have the chance.'

The Princess made no further resistance; but, retiring to her room, opened her wardrobe, and dressed herself in every article of

clothing she possessed — silks, satins, furs, woollen stuffs, and linen.

Poor thing! all this heap of clothing made her very hot and uncomfortable; but she thought little of that in her anxiety to increase her weight. Then, calling her maid, she insisted on having the contents of three pots of pomatum, and two bottles of thick hair-oil, rubbed on to her head, so that her tresses alone were a considerable weight.

Not content yet, she had two feather-beds tied securely round her, and then at length consented to let the hideous little dwarf attempt to carry her up the mountain.

Florentina could not, of course, walk downstairs enveloped as she was; her attendants, therefore, gently rolled her down the broad staircase like a barrel of beer, and, being so well protected, it did not hurt her in the least; in fact she rather liked it.

But oh! what a rage the humpbacked suitor was in when he caught sight of her!

'It is not fair, not fair,' he screamed out again and again. 'Take off all those things, madam. How dare you treat me like this?'

'No, no,' interposed the King, as soon as he

could speak for laughing at the funny figure his daughter cut. 'There was nothing said about clothing in the agreement, and you can't make her take it off. Ha! Ha! Florentina has got her wits about her;' and with that he went off into another fit of laughter, in which all the courtiers joined. The wretched dwarf, seeing that the case was hopeless, caught up the Princess in his arms and began to toil up the mountain with her. And now she began to be frightened, for, dwarf as he was, he seemed endued with the strength of a giant, and the mountain was already half scaled before his breath began to fail. Then, puffing and blowing, he said, in angry tones, 'It is only these feather-beds, and all this nasty-smelling pomatum; if it were not for these additions I could have carried you to the top in a trice.'

'You had much better give it up at once,' said Florentina. 'See how you are slipping about. Now do take my advice,' and while speaking she pressed as heavily as she could against him, so that he lost his footing, and fell back, rolling over and over till he reached the bottom of the mountain.

Florentina, of course, rolled with him, but beyond a few scratches on her face she was not hurt, being so well protected by her coverings. The king ordered his daughter to retire to her apartments to undress and to rest, for she was very tired; and having ascertained that the presumptuous dwarf was not killed by his fall, he gave orders for his banishment from the kingdom, and then retired into the palace, devoutly hoping no more suitors would make their appearance for some time to come. If fathers, however, will have lovely daughters, they must expect these daughters to be sought in marriage, and so the number of suitors did not diminish, and the poor Princess became very weary of the frequent and unsuccessful attempts to carry her to the top of the mountain, which had become the bugbear of her life.

One day when, attended by a lady-in-waiting, she was walking in a lovely meadow, gathering flowers and playing with her little dog Snowball, an ugly little figure suddenly sprang from behind a large rock, and catching up the dainty white playfellow ran off with it quickly, uttering hideous yells of delight. The Princess recognised her disappointed dwarf suitor whom she

believed to have been banished from the kingdom, and cried aloud in fear and sorrow, fearing never to see her beloved little Snowball again.

Her cries however, were heard, and very soon she once more held the poor panting wee dog in her arms. At first she could only kiss and fondle her treasure, then she remembered there must be some one to thank, and looking up she beheld a handsome youth gazing at her apparently overwhelmed by her marvellous beauty.

'O thank you, thank you!' was all the Princess could say, for his earnest look filled her with confusion, 'that dreadful dwarf, he—'

'Are you the Princess Florentina?' asked the stranger, as she paused. 'You must be she, no one else could be so wonderfully beautiful.'

Here the lady-in-waiting uttered a warning 'h'm hem.'

'Yes,' answered Florentina, 'I am that unlucky damsel, who is for ever being dragged up and down a slippery mountain. Life is fast becoming a burden to me.'

'Oh, lovely maiden, who, having once beheld you, could refrain from trying to win you!'

exclaimed the youth passionately. 'Still, so great is the love inspired in my heart by even this brief glimpse of you, that sooner than cause you one moment's annoyance I will never see your face again.'

The Princess blushed and hid her face in Snowball's fluffy coat. The lady-in-waiting drew nearer, and this time gave a loud 'hem.' She did not approve of such behaviour. But neither did Florentina approve of interference, and lifting her face, very rosy now, she faltered out that perhaps it was not impossible —she would not—so—very much—mind *one* more trip up the mountain, if—if she was sure of being carried to the top, and then, aggravated by a louder and very fierce 'hem' from the lady-in-waiting, she added 'by *you*, kind youth,' and once more buried her face in the friendly Snowball.

'Oh, lovely Princess!' cried the youth overjoyed, 'your words will give me strength for any ascent; but that I may not fail I will ask the aid of my fairy godmother;' and kissing her hand, in spite of a torrent of 'hems' from the outraged lady in waiting, he bade her farewell, with the promise that in three days' time

he would appear at the palace and carry her to the summit of the mountain. On her return home Florentina told her father all that had happened. King Hoel was very angry to hear that the dwarf had escaped banishment, but he received the rest of her intelligence very calmly, for he had no fear of losing his daughter,—so many attempts to scale the mountain having failed. He knew nothing, however, about the fairy godmother, or perhaps he might not have been so easy in his mind. The Princess passed the three days of waiting entirely in her own apartments; and it was remarked that she ate nothing, only drinking a little milk two or three times a day, so that her strength might not quite fail. She was, of course, most anxious to reduce her weight by every possible expedient; and when the important day arrived she desired her maid in waiting to bring her the finest and thinnest clothes she possessed, and of these she only put on just what was necessary.

The King sent word that when she was ready he would pay her a visit in her own apartments. There was a frown on his face when he entered, and it was not decreased by

his daughter's appearance. Thin from fasting, and in her scanty apparel, she looked so light and fragile that he trembled lest the brave strong youth with whom he had been speaking should succeed where so many others had failed.

'Put on your purple velvet and ermine directly, Florentina,' he commanded. But his daughter shook her head, and her pale determined countenance told him all remonstrance would be useless. Nevertheless he raged and stormed, and attempted to have her heavy robes put on her by force, until he saw that she was really too weak to bear much persecution, and that if he did not wish to lose his daughter altogether he had better let her have her own way. So she was carried downstairs—for she was too weak to walk—and placed in the arms of her new suitor, whom, it may be said, the King had discovered to be the son of a rich and powerful King, with whom he was constantly on the point of making war. The Prince gazed sorrowfully at the lily-pale Florentina, but she smiled up at him, and told him she should recover when the summit of the mountain was reached.

'Have no fear,' he answered, 'my fairy godmother has given me an elixir composed of strength-giving herbs, so that if I feel faint one drop will renew my strength.'

There was, as usual, a large crowd assembled to witness the ascent, and among it were many who wished the Prince success, for the Princess was much beloved, and the report had gone forth that she favoured this new suitor. There were others, however, who did not share these amiable feelings, and these were the friends of all the unsuccessful suitors. Among the crowd also was the hideous little dwarf, who had been so *tricked*, as he called it, by the Princess. Of course he was determined to do all he could to spite the lovers, and his wrath was excited to boiling point by Florentina's light and airy costume. There were no heavy velvets, furs, and bearskins now, let alone pomatum and feather-beds. 'He shall never win her, never!' he hissed between his little sharp teeth, and his friends echoed the words.

And now the ascent began, and three parts of the mountain had been scaled easily and gracefully by the Prince. Suddenly his strength seemed failing; Florentina felt his arms relax-

ing their strong hold, and she entreated him to refresh himself with a few drops of the elixir. At this moment a torrent of hisses led by the dwarf arose from the foot of the mountain; and cries of 'he is falling,' 'he must fail,' 'Oh you impostor!' were hurled at him, hitting him like so many stones.

'Dear one,' he said to the Princess, 'I must not rest, even for a second. If I do, these wicked cries and hisses will increase, and they are already almost too much for me.' So he struggled on and on, feeling as if every step must be his last. The cries and hisses increased, and reached him still, while unhappily he could not hear the cheers and words of encouragement that were also sent after him. Poor Florentina fainted, and it was now quite impossible for him to use his fairy godmother's gift, even could he have ventured to tarry for one moment on the slippery surface. Despair raged in his breast, he seemed to have no strength left; still he struggled on with his beloved burden. One step more and the summit would be gained.

'Florentina! my Florentina!' was his faint cry, as, his task accomplished, he sank with

her to the ground, 'at least we die together.' And so it was. They were beyond all help from the elixir now; their strength was utterly spent, and on the summit of the huge slippery mountain they lay dead in each other's arms.

An eagle who had watched the ascent, and who grieved over the untimely fate of the unhappy lovers, determined in his kingly heart that they should have a beautiful and fragrant grave. With his beak he gently took from the Prince's breast the bottle of elixir, and, breaking it, poured the contents around. Immediately there sprang up the most beautiful flowers of every shape and hue, and these grew and grew till they formed a floral tomb, in which the bodies of the lovers rested undisturbed. The flowers were so bright and of such size that even the old King could see them from the roof of his palace. And so great were his grief and remorse for his daughter's sad fate, that he knew no peace of mind unless he were watching the flowers; so he built himself a little room, and gazed at them from morning to night.

'Quite mad,' his subjects called him, and

perhaps he was; at any rate, nobody grieved overmuch, when one day he was found dead kneeling at his little window, whence his poor old eyes had taken their last look at Florentina's beautiful grave.

THE SHRIMP PRINCE.

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EJECTED and depressed in mind, an unusually small and shrivelled shrimp was one day hopping about his sandy home. He did not find favour with his relations; his mother, who was a fine well-grown shrimp was constantly reproaching him with his miserable shrivelled appearance, and was wont to make fun of him in every way. Consequently the poor little fellow shrank more and more into himself,

and in time learnt to keep his thoughts and fancies to himself.

'Oh to be big, to be big!' he would sigh over and over again; and his eyes would protrude almost out of their sockets with admiration when the transparent prawns passed by, gracefully waving their feelers, little dreaming of the cruel fate that in all probability awaited them.

One day, as, devoured by envy, he was gazing after them, a gruff voice close behind him exclaimed—

'Hullo, youngster, look out, or I shall be the death of you!'

The shrimp gave a bound out of the way of the enormous creature, who, clad as it were in black armour, all arms and legs, had nearly put an end to his existence. It was a lobster, who, notwithstanding his hard shell had a soft heart, and would not willingly have hurt even a shrivelled little shrimp.

'Why, what's the matter?' he said, noticing our poor small friend's mournful looks; 'I didn't hurt you, did I?'

'Oh no; only—only I wish I were as big as you.'

'Why, I might as well wish to be as large as a whale,' answered the lobster, 'and what good would that do? Come, little shrimp, don't be discontented, you can boast of more legs than I can, though to sure they are rather thin, but still—'

'Yes,' interrupted the shrimp bitterly, 'I have thirty-two legs, and can't walk with one of them.'

'But you can jump famously,' said the lobster consolingly; 'you have only to curl up your tail, and away you go. Fine gambols you shrimps seem to have. Now, we can't enjoy ourselves that way; and indeed,' went on the lobster rather dejectedly, 'we have some very unpleasant moments in our lives. I have just gone through a great deal.'

'Oh, do tell me about it,' cried the shrimp.

'Well, a time arrives in our lives when our bodies become too large for our shells. It is not comfortable, I can tell you. We swell and swell, and feel as if we must burst, but no such luck happens. The more we eat the bigger of course we grow, so at last we leave off eating and hide ourselves in some hole or corner. Here we lie panting, and wishing ourselves dead, until by degrees we get thinner, and are

able once more to breathe in our shells. But we feel we must get rid of these shells, so we wriggle about till at last they begin to split, and with some difficulty we contrive to creep out of them. When I got out of mine the other day I was so weak and tired I could only just crawl and hide myself in a safe place.'

'Why did you want to hide?' asked the shrimp.

'Because my poor soft body would have been a delicate morsel to any one of my brother lobsters, so I took good care to keep out of the way.'

'But you have a fine new coat now,' said the shrimp.

'Oh yes; a new one always comes after a little while; and now that I have gone through some of my troubles I mean to enjoy life a little, if only I can escape being caught by those nasty baskets the wicked fishermen throw into the sea. Come, little shrimp, cheer up! We all have our troubles, you see, big and small alike. I would advise you to question those you meet before you make up your mind that you are more to be pitied than other people.'

And with this excellent advice, and a good-

natured nod, the lobster marched off, followed by the admiring eyes of the shrimp. But the small creature was still discontented, and still panted to be of greater size and consequence in the sea; sitting up on his little tail in a melancholy attitude, he covered his eyes with some of his numerous legs. The sound of soft singing roused him, and looking up he saw a lovely mermaid sitting on a rock combing her hair. The shrimp had heard of such a being, but this was the first time his eyes had beheld one. Very soon the mermaid ceased singing and began talking to herself. 'Ah me! ah me! Could I but escape from this dreary wet life how happy I should be! Oh to be a daughter of Earth, to get rid of this tail! Ah me! ah me! why cannot it be!'

The shrimp listened eagerly to this wail. What—this beautiful creature,—did she, too, wish to be other than she was? Surely, then, he had no cause to be ashamed of his aspiring soul. Hitherto he had been derided and mocked by all to whom he had told his sorrows. True, the lobster had spoken kindly, but even he had given him no encouragement. Perhaps, however, this beautiful creature would under-

stand him; and the next moment, with a hop, skip, and a bound he was by her side, making his presence known by chirping in a feeble treble. 'I, too, would be other than I am, for every one laughs at me, because I am only a shrivelled little shrimp.'

'Poor wee creature,' said the mermaid kindly. 'And what is it you wish to be—a prawn?'

'Until this moment I have panted to be a lobster, but now I feel that would not content me. I would be a herring,—a salmon;—no, a whale!'

To his surprise the mermaid did not laugh. She only said, 'An ugly, fat, black, oily creature, with a throat so small that he can only feed on jelly fishes and similar creatures. No, no, little shrimp, size is not everything. Now, *I* sigh to be one of another world. To leave for ever this lower atmosphere, and rise to that of earth. I would be a mortal,—a princess!'

'And I,' cried the shrimp, inspired by her beauty and presence,—'I would be a prince!'

Wishes are sometimes granted; and, as you know, in fairyland nothing is impossible. In less time than it takes to write the words the mermaid and the shrimp were changed

into a princess and a prince, and found themselves high and dry in a beautiful city, where everything and every one seemed made for happiness. In that wonderful fashion common to fairyland, they dropped at once into their right places; and if they had not known to the contrary, might have fancied they had always been a prince and a princess, so neatly did they fit into their present places.

But—there is a 'but' sometimes, you see, even in fairyland—neither the mermaid nor the shrimp could forget their past state. They might, perhaps, have done so, had they never come in contact one with the other, but seeing each other daily made it impossible.

Not that the mermaid wished to see the prince shrimp daily, she would have given her long back hair with pleasure to any one who would have relieved her from his unwelcome attention; for he had fallen deeply in love with her, and followed her about with the pertinacity of a shell-fish. This was not the only reason for her dislike; the true reason was that he, and he alone, knew that she had once possessed a tail,—that appendage of which she had always been dreadfully ashamed, and which she now

ardently desired to forget. She need not have been alarmed. The poor prince had no wish to rake up old grievances either for her or for himself: neither would he have vexed or mortified her on any account.

He was very miserable in his new phase of existence, notwithstanding his present size, and the state and splendour in which he lived. There was no one he loved save the beautiful mermaid, and she did not conceal the dislike and disdain she felt for him. Some things, too, in his new life were very dreadful. He almost fainted at the sight of cooked fish, although it is true that at first he failed to recognise the graceful undulating sole in the flat brown substance brought to table, or the delicate whiting in its contorted form, tail in mouth. But once, when a dish of limp brown shrimps, their poor eyes protruding piteously from the sockets, was placed before him, he screamed aloud, and demanded fiercely who had dared to murder his relations. All present stared in amazement, and thought he had suddenly gone mad, whereupon, recollecting himself, he tried to excuse his vehemence by saying he was not well and did not know what he was saying. No-

body, however, forgot the scene, or another which happened soon after, at a dinner party given by the King. A lobster was placed before the Prince, and he was requested to serve it. Our poor friend turned quite sick at the request, but looking round the table he failed to see the well-known black form, and, much relieved, made a low bow, saying that he could see no lobster on the table.

'Why, Prince alive, where are your eyes?' shouted the old King; 'what is that just in front of you I should like to know?'

'This, your majesty, this red object, do you mean? Indeed I cannot say.'

'Look at it closer, then,' commanded the King, 'it is time you should know a lobster by sight;' and he had the dish pushed close under the nose of the poor Prince. Then, indeed, he began to recognise an old acquaintance, but in what a piecemeal condition! The tail split in two, the claws broken in halves, lying on each side of the dish, and the poor head,—a ghastly object, sitting up helplessly in the centre, each finger (feeler, we should say) stiff and rigid.

The Prince sickened with horror as he took in all the details of the sight before him.

'Come, come!' roared the King, losing patience, 'are these good manners to keep your sovereign waiting? Give me half the tail and a good spoonful out of the head.' Shuddering from head to foot the Prince put forth his hand to seize the lobster's head, when he fancied he saw a resemblance in the face to his friend who had spoken so kindly to him the last day he was in the sea. It was too much. Muttering some inaudible excuse, he jumped up from his chair and rushed headlong from the room. Needless to say he was not again invited to the palace.

All this caused the poor Prince to be regarded with cold looks. 'He was so odd,' people said: some laughed at him, others despised him, but nobody liked him. In one respect only did he ever gain applause, and that was at the athletic sports, which took place very often, and which were highly patronised by the King's sons. Here, indeed, our poor shrimp Prince would excel all others in jumping. It was quite extraordinary the height he could go, and the ease with which he vaulted into the air. 'Not gracefully though,' said the spectators. No; that could not be

conceded, for he curled up his legs in the oddest manner imaginable while preparing for the leap, and his back went out and his back went in, in a way that puzzled all the wiseacres extremely; and a scientific treatise was written in consequence on the formation of the human body and the origin of man, which was certainly not founded on fact as far as the poor shrimp was concerned. This wonderful power of jumping made him almost happy for a little while; but this feeling did not last long, for after the first astonishment was over nobody ever said a kind word to him or praised his skill. Some turned away with envy, it is true, but they strove to conceal it under a pretence of scorn, and others could not hide their amusement at the funny figure he cut.

And all this time the dislike of the beautiful mermaid increased daily. He did not even dare to speak to her now, she became so angry at the first word. Meanwhile, all went well with her. She was courted, and fêted, and petted to her heart's content, and, so report said, would soon marry the King's eldest son. But before this took place she was very anxious that the shrimp Prince should be

compelled to leave the kingdom, for she lived in terror lest that little story of her tail should come out. One day, much to his surprise, the King's eldest son invited him, in the most affable manner, to take a ramble with him by the sea-shore. Hitherto he had taken every opportunity of treating him with the utmost scorn and rudeness, so that the shrimp Prince was at a loss to account for this sudden change; but being of a simple unsuspecting nature, he accepted the invitation with much pleasure. They wandered on for a long distance; our poor friend so delighted at being treated kindly that he took no note of time or place, until it suddenly occurred to him that the sun was sinking fast, and that they were a long way from home. He therefore proposed to his companion that they should retrace their steps.

'Would you know your way back?' asked the Prince.

'No, indeed,' answered the other. 'I have been so much engrossed by my conversation with you; and we have wandered in and out so among these sandhills, that I should be in a bad plight if you were not here to act as guide.'

The Prince gave a short laugh.

'Deluded creature! Know that I have brought you here to perish. We are in the midst of treacherous quicksands, the safe passage through which is alone known to me. Hope not to find your way home safely without assistance, and that you may cry for in vain. This is your punishment for your presumption in loving my future bride,' and with a mocking laugh the Prince disappeared into the gathering gloom, leaving our poor betrayed shrimp faint and sick with fear. He was afraid to stir lest the treacherous sand should swallow him up. He looked round on the desolate scene, and decided there was no hope of escape for him, and that his fate would be a lingering death from starvation. What would he not have given at that moment to have been a little shrivelled shrimp safe in the briny sea!

Salt tears fell from his eyes as he bemoaned his sad fate. He raised his hand to dash them away, and at the same moment was aware of a female form standing before him, and heard a kind voice say, 'Do not be afraid, I will guide you safely to my hut away from these quicksands. Follow me.'

Amazed and overjoyed, scarcely believing

he was saved, he followed his guide, being careful to tread in her very footsteps, until at length she stopped in a place where the desolation was not quite so great, some coarse grass and a few sea poppies being visible. A faint wreath of smoke attracted his eye, and he found it came from the chimney of a tiny hut which lay at the foot of one of the largest sand-hillocks.

His guide led the way to the door. 'Come in,' she said. 'You will be safe here from treacherous kindness, though this is but a poor little place.' It was indeed a very poor place, but kept as clean as a new pin.

'And do you live here all alone?' asked the shrimp Prince, for the first time perceiving that his hostess was young and fair. 'How dull and lonely you must be.'

'Not at all,' she replied. 'I have plenty to do; and the creatures of the sea are my friends?'

'The creatures of the sea! Do you mean fishes and lobsters?'

'Yes; and crabs, prawns, and especially the shrimps. Dear little creatures they are my greatest friends.'

Our shrimp looked at her in astonishment.

'*Friends?* What can you mean, fair maiden? how can such insignificant beings be friends to you?'

Marina,—for so she was called,—laughed. 'Ah! that is my secret; and I am not sure that I can tell it you; anyhow we must wait till to-morrow, and now, good night, for it is getting late,' and with this she vanished, leaving the Prince a prey to curiosity. Who and what could she be, leading a solitary life in this little hut with sea creatures only for her friends? There was no sleep for the Prince that night. He tossed and tossed to and fro on his couch, thinking over his adventures; reviling the King's son, and in his secret soul wishing he were a shrimp again, since Marina would not despise him in that form. At daybreak he rose and wandered down to the seashore. Soon his attention was attracted by the soft tones of his hostess in conversation apparently with some one. Who could it be?

Curiosity overpowered him, and hiding himself cautiously behind the hillocks whence her voice proceeded, he peeped round and beheld a curious scene. Marina was leaning against

the hillock, her small white feet dabbling in a pool of clear water, while round and round them swam myriads of tiny shrimps. How the heart of our poor Prince leaped at sight of them! Marina's hands were placed together so as to form a cup, which was filled with sea water, and in it, seated erect on her tail, looking up into the maiden's face and speaking earnestly, was a large shrimp.

The Prince nearly betrayed himself, for at the second glance he recognised his own mother! He listened eagerly to her words, and to his astonishment heard her deploring, with salt and bitter tears, the fact of his disappearance.

'Oh!' she cried, 'I never treated him as I should have done, he was neither so large nor so plump as my other children, and I despised him, called him "shrivelled" and other dreadful names. Oh dear, oh dear, and he took it to heart, poor darling, and has gone away, and I shall never see him again!'

Marina tried to console the weeping mother, but to no purpose.

'It was doubtless wrong of you to treat him differently from the others,' she said gently,

'for he could not help his appearance; but do not despair, you may yet find him again. Where do you think he may be?'

'There is a rumour,' answered the shrimp, 'that he is enchanted and is somewhere on earth in the guise of a man. Oh if only I could discover him and disenchant him, for I am sure he cannot be happy, he must be longing for his native element, and a gambol with his brothers and sisters!'

As she spoke, a craving for the sea awoke in the heart of the enchanted shrimp; his legs ached for a swim, and pined for a good jump untrammelled by man's attire. With a wild desire to be free, he sprang into the air over the hillock and the pool, thereby so startling his poor mother, that she took a flying leap from Marina's hands and disappeared into the sea, followed by the other shrimps.

Being a fairy, Marina was not startled, she recognised at once her guest, who ashamed of his impulsive behaviour, approached very humbly, begged her pardon, and then made known his identity. He told her of his early life, of the jibes and ill-treatment he had received, of his desire to be something higher than a

miserable shrivelled shrimp, of his meeting with the beautiful mermaid, and of their subsequent enchantment, finally of her scorn of his unhappy life at court, of all the mortifications he had undergone, and of the treachery of the king's son.

'And now,' said Marina, when he had finished, 'what is your present wish? For if it in any way relates to the sea I can grant it?'

'Let me be a shrimp once more,' he cried, 'and return to my mother and brethren.'

No sooner were the words uttered than he found himself in the pool before him, once more in his right character and in his right element.

The fairy looked down at him kindly. 'You have chosen wisely,' she said; 'you are now no longer miserable or shrivelled, a finer shrimp does not swim in the sea. Forget your former unhappiness, and be satisfied with your lot. In any trouble come to me, these sandhills are my home, and no shellfish ever appeals to me in vain.'

The shrimp thanked her warmly, waved an adieu with his feelers, and soon found himself in the arms of his mother, surrounded by a circle of admiring shrimps listening with breath-

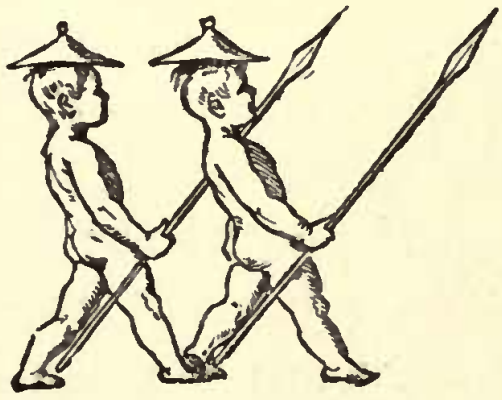
less attention to his adventures. And with one accord, they hoped devoutly that the scornful mermaid's secret would be discovered, and that she would never marry the king's eldest son.

'I care not now,' said our shrimp; 'she may marry whom she please so long as I am not her husband. Faugh! She need not have been so alarmed, her tail was her chief attraction in *my* eyes, I would not have taken her without it at a gift!'

It is convenient sometimes to change our opinions with time and circumstances.

GRUMBLEWITCH.

GRUMBLEWITCH.



HERE Grumblewitch lived is not of much account, but we may fairly imagine it must have been in or near Fairyland, because of the wonderful deeds she performed.

No one, however, would have called her a fairy. In appearance she was a regular old witch, with bent form, long sharp nose, and small twinkling grey eyes. Add a harsh croaky voice, and you must own that her title of Grumblewitch suited her to a nicety.

She and her servant Jan lived in a good-sized old-fashioned cottage a little way from

the town. It was well known that they lived by their wits, for money they had none. And without doubt these wits must have been very sharp, for the best of everything was to be found at the cottage. The sleekest cattle, the fattest pigs, the best-bred horses belonged to Grumblewitch; so no wonder she was regarded with envy and suspicion by her neighbours. Even her flowers were the admiration of all passers-by. No such lovely roses bloomed elsewhere; and the pinks might indeed be called pinks of perfection. The neighbours and chance travellers would stand gazing in admiration at her flowers, but not one blossom would she ever give away. 'Be off, be off, don't stand idling here,' were her customary words, shaking her stick at them; and with a shrug of disappointment, vowing she was the crossest old witch in the world, they were obliged to go their way.

Some of them, the most observant, were wont to say that for all their beauty the roses did not look carelessly happy, as roses usually do. They had a beseeching look,—one could almost fancy they were holding out invisible arms and crying, 'Take me away! take me

away!' and they said that the pinks held their heads so high and grew so straight because they were anxious to grow out of reach of Grumblewitch altogether; but these were considered mere foolish fancies by the wise and busy.

How these good people would have opened their eyes had they known the truth with regard to these poor flowers! For the roses were beautiful princesses, and the pinks nice little dandies, whom Grumblewitch had enchanted in order to adorn her garden. Every thing about the place was enchanted. The oxen were fat old farmers, the horses men and women, the pigs greedy people of all sizes and ages, and the crows and ravens were dirty smutty chimney-sweeps.

In short, whenever Grumblewitch wanted anything she would take one of her wicked walks abroad and never return empty-handed. It so happened that the country was, at that time, infested by wild fierce beasts, and whenever any one was missing it was always supposed that he or she had fallen a prey to these dreadful animals; but far, far oftener it was Grumblewitch who was the old wolf who carried them off.

Every morning she would call to her servant, and say—

'Jan, is anything wanted to-day?'

Sometimes Jan would answer—

'No, mistress, not to-day.' But more often, and especially on market-days, 'Yes, mistress, a score of things or more.'

One morning when Grumblewitch had made the usual inquiry, the answer was—

'We want a sieve, mistress, a spoon, a sucking pig, a magpie, and a peacock.'

'Very well,' said Grumblewitch, 'you shall have them. The four last are easy enough to procure, the first rather puzzles me.'

'Oh, mistress, you'll find it fast enough,' grinned Jan, 'let you alone for that.'

Grumblewitch sallied forth dressed in her usual quaint style, and leaning heavily on her stick.

She went on and on till she came to the market-place. Here she took up her post as far removed from observation as possible, and gave her eyes and ears a good rubbing, so as to see and hear all that was going on. 'Some folks,' she muttered, 'say at times they can't believe their own ears; mercy on us!

what a slapping I should give mine if they ever dared to play me false!'

Her eyes were now so wide awake that they could see everything that was passing in the market-place with the greatest accuracy, and her ears were equally sharp. There was a poor sawny youth trying to sell a horse, and being laughed and jeered at unmercifully by the idle ones of the place. Time after time he clambered up painfully on to the horse to show off its paces, but was so frightened at the least movement of the animal that he screamed aloud, and, flinging both arms round the creature's neck, hung on terrified till he was kicked off.

A grin of satisfaction distorted the old hag's face. 'You'll do for me,' thought she, and hobbling across the market-place she ventured as near to the kicking animal as she dared, and muttered a few words in her native gibberish. Then giving a loud scream she pretended the horse had kicked her, and fell on the ground rolling over and over. Immediately cries arose of 'poor old thing,' 'pick her up,' 'take care,' 'what has become of the lout?' And Grumblewitch was soon once more on her feet, while

nothing could be seen of the authors of the accident. The horse had galloped off, but without his rider, and the general inquiry was 'Where can he be?'

Only Grumblewitch could have answered that question, and you may be sure *she* did not enlighten them. No, she hobbled off, patting her pocket tenderly, for safe in that receptacle was the unfortunate youth in the shape of a long gravy-spoon. 'And that is his proper form,' thought Grumblewitch, 'he will be a great deal more useful thus than he ever was before in his life. Now for my other wants.'

Presently she heard sounds of merriment which proceeded from a knot of persons some little way off. Her ears being so sharp, Grumblewitch did not need to go any nearer to hear what was being said.

'Now then, Talkative Jim,' cried one of the group, 'fire away, that was a capital story about Tom's wife; can't you tell us one about Tom himself?' Oh yes, Jim was willing enough to oblige his friends; only of course no one must repeat to Tom what was said, or he should get into trouble, Tom having told him the story as

a great secret. All promised secrecy, and applause and laughter followed Jim's recital, and more and more stories were demanded of him until all the secret affairs of his friends as well as his own had leaked out from Talkative Jim.

'That's my man,' thought Grumblewitch exultantly, 'it could not be better. Why, he has only to be shaken a little with a few questions, and everything he knows leaks out of him like water from a sieve. Yes, and a sieve he shall be!'

Talkative Jim, having finished his stories for the time being, had separated from his companions, and was now approaching Grumblewitch. Hobbling a little way to meet him, the transformation was soon effected. A few words muttered, Talkative Jim vanished and the sieve that remained in his place was quickly and quietly tucked under Grumblewitch's capacious cloak.

Nobody observed what had happened; the busy market-place was a good field of action for the old hag, as the noise and general bustle allowed her wicked deeds to pass unnoticed.

Jan was waiting in a quiet corner to carry

home the goods. He grinned when his mistress placed the sieve in his hands. 'Ay, ay, you have got the best sieve in the market, sure enough, and why, I declare if this spoon isn't Sawny Joe! Ha, ha, ha! You *are* a clever one, mistress, and no mistake;' for Jan, it must be told, had a touch of magic about him, and although he could not enchant any one, yet he was able to see through the transformations. 'Take them home carefully, Jan, and then return here, bringing some string with you to tie round the pig's neck.'

The little pig was easily found in a small greedy child making himself sick with sucking lollipops, and there was not much difficulty with regard to the peacock, with so many vain over-dressed flaunting young women strutting about the market-place. The magpie, however, *was* a difficulty. There were plenty of chatter-boxes, but the hard task was to catch one by herself.

'Try "Shrill Bess," or "Noisy Nan," whispered Jan; 'either would make a first-rate magpie.'

Very likely; their shrill voices and never-ending chatter were enough to confirm his opinion, but while the girls were incessantly

gossiping to one person or another nothing could be done.

Restless as magpies, they were first here, then there, till Grumblewitch grew giddy in following their quick movements. At length fortune favoured her in the shape of a small boy, who appeared on the scene, calling loudly for Noisy Nan, who was wanted at home instantly. Grumblewitch at once hobbled off in the direction the girl would take, for she foresaw rightly that it would be some little time before the chatterbox would tear herself away from her companions. Noisy Nan when she did depart took to her heels to make up for lost time, and was running past Grumblewitch, when a few words of gibberish stopped her career and changed her into a magpie.

In the hurry of the moment, however, one word was forgotten, and the right eye was in consequence left disenchanted. Now Noisy Nan had very small dark twinkling eyes, not unlike those of a magpie, and Grumblewitch did not notice the difference between the right and left eye as she caught her up quickly and hobbled back to the market-place, chuckling hideously over her success. If she had only

known of the omission she would not have been quite so hilarious, for by reason of the enchantment being incomplete the magpie could see, hear, and understand all that went on. The girl was naturally so cunning there was not much danger of her being found out, unless, indeed, her chattering tongue betrayed her. That was the danger for Noisy Nan; however, she determined to be very prudent, and vowed deep vengeance on Grumblewitch all the way home. She nearly betrayed herself on the first appearance of the spoon and the sieve. Sawny Joe and Talkative Jim were old acquaintances, and to see them under forms that so exactly suited them set her off into peals of laughter, and caused Grumblewitch and Jan to eye her with quick glances of suspicion.

'Take care,' quoth Nan to herself; and, checking her laughter, she subsided into the ordinary hoarse cry of a magpie, Ki! ko! ko! ko!

'She's a merry one, she is,' said Jan. 'She'll keep the house alive, she will.'

As the days went by poor Nan's merriment subsided rapidly. Her new life had been amusing enough at first, so many old ac-

quaintances did she discover in disguise; but as they had no remembrance of themselves or of her, all the fun was on her side, and that, as we know, soon grows wearisome. One day, when no one was near, she took up the gravy spoon in her beak and addressed it as Sawny Joe, but to no purpose. Joe was thoroughly enchanted and could only have understood the language of spoons, if indeed there be one. Then Nan tried the peacock, who, as Gaudy Jane, had been an intimate friend of hers, but the creature did not understand one word, and only spread her tail, curved her neck, and strutted about, uttering discordant cries. The same with the pig, the sieve, and other old friends;—all were hopelessly enchanted.

Nan fancied the roses showed faint signs of intelligence, for they lifted their heads when she addressed them and sighed softly, but that was all.

Poor Nan! She soon grew tired of her wicker cage, and of Grumblewitch's cracked ugly voice and hideous face. Bitterly did she lament her fate and sigh impatiently for a change: and one day it came.

Grumblewitch and Jan were both out, and

Nan was safely shut up in her cage, when a wonderful thing happened. A man came leaping along over gates, over hedges, over walls, even over small trees until he landed right in the middle of Grumblewitch's garden. 'Ki! ki! ki! ko! ko! ko!' chattered Nan noisily, in order to attract his attention. Looking up, he spied her in the cage. 'Undo the door,' she said softly, but the man was so taken aback at being thus addressed by a magpie that he stood petrified with gaping mouth staring at Nan till his eyes almost left their sockets.

'Idiot!' she exclaimed sharply, 'don't lose time; open the door of my cage; I have been enchanted by wicked old Grumblewitch, and in reality I am a very pretty girl. Come, look sharp, or Grumblewitch will be back, and then you will be turned into a bounding ball, as sure as my name is Noisy Nan.'

This frightened the man, and he opened the door of the cage quickly enough.

'Now then,' said Nan, 'hide me in the breast-pocket of your coat, and bound away as fast as you can out of this den of enchantment.'

Away bounded the man over hedges, ditches, walls, houses, and small trees, until Nan, tired

and giddy with the incessant motion, called out to him to stop.

'Why, you are not even out of breath,' said Nan admiringly, as she sat on his shoulder and peered at him with her one human eye.

'Tired!' he scoffed; 'what, with that little bound? Why, I could leap up to the sun fifty times running, and not be tired.'

'Hm!' said Nan, 'I hardly believe that; but never mind, go on. Have you anything further extraordinary to tell me?'

'Oh yes! I have heard my mother say that the moment I was born I bounded out of the nurse's arms out of the room and out of the house up to the top of the highest tree thereabouts, where for two days a squirrel fed me with nuts.'

'Dear me,' said Nan composedly, 'how very cold you must have been!'

'Oh no; the leaps had circulated my blood so well that I could not feel cold.'

'Indeed; anything more?'

'Would you like to see me playing leap-frog over a few steeples and church-towers?'

'Not now, if you please. I know you can leap very well, although I may not believe

you are quite so wonderful as you make yourself out to be. However, this is the question, and a very serious one for me: Will you help me out of this horrible disguise?'

'If I can,' answered the man, who was good-nature itself; 'but how am I to manage it?'

'By discovering the abode of the only creature who can undo the wicked deeds of Grumblewitch. Fortunately I know of her existence, from having overheard a conversation between Jan and his wicked mistress the other day. From this I learnt that there is a little fairy more powerful even than Grumblewitch, and she alone can disenchant me and all the hapless creatures I have left behind. The name of this fairy is Sleepyfay, and although her power is so great, she is so lazy that she will not give herself any trouble if she can help it. She lives at the top of a high crag, and whenever she does move employs an eagle to carry her on his back. Now, the first thing is to get speech of her.'

'Nothing easier,' answered Bounding Jack. 'I know some one who will direct me to her abode. If you will perch on this tree and wait for me, I will go off at once and make inquiries.'

Away he bounded, and Nan, hopping on to a leafy bough, promised to await his return. She could not, however, remain stationary long. Peering about, she discovered a nest a little higher up in the tree. Flying to it and peeping in, she saw four small newly-fledged birds.

'How do you do?' said Nan in magpie language; 'does your mother know you're out?' But the little birds, frightened at the apparition, only huddled closer together, twittering faintly with fear.

'Little fools,' said Nan; 'I shan't hurt you. Come out with me and fly about a little,' for being entirely ignorant of the manners and customs of birds, she thought they were able to fly as soon as they left the egg. 'Can't fly! can't fly! go away, do!' twittered the cowering little creatures; and at that moment, much to their relief, back came the mother bird, a fine grown jackdaw, who flew angrily at Nan offering to fight her if she did not go away that very instant.

'Come, come,' chattered Nan, 'what harm have I done? I was only talking pleasantly to these frightened creatures, and offering to take them out for a fly.'

'Fly, indeed!' answered the incensed jackdaw; 'could *you* fly, pray, when you were only just out of the shell? Be off with you! No good ever came yet from a magpie or ever will. Chatter and thieving,—that is all *you* can do.'

'Come, come, friend, remember the proverb, "Those who live in glass houses,—"' but the jackdaw would hear no more, and gave poor Nan so many angry pecks that she thought it prudent to retreat, and flying off retired to her first resting-place to await Bounding Jack's return.

At length he came, with the good news that he had discovered the abode of Sleepyfay, although he had failed to get speech of her by reason of her being fast asleep. He was told that she was sometimes so long in waking, took so many hours to gape, yawn, stretch herself, and become thoroughly roused from sleep, that it would be useless for him to wait. Sometimes when there was urgent business in hand she had to be well shaken before sleep would entirely leave her brain; and the fear always was lest she should slumber again before her task was over.

'I 'll see to that,' said Nan; 'my chatter will keep her awake, I flatter myself.'

'It ought to,' thought Bounding Jack, whose ears and head ached under it.

It took a great many bounds to reach the top of the high crag where Sleepyfay dwelt; but at length it was accomplished, and an interview demanded by Jack and Nan on the plea of important business. Sleepyfay was scarcely awake, but nevertheless they were admitted to her presence. She was very tiny and very fat, with small twinkling eyes that were always aching for sleep. When Jack and Nan appeared, she was doing her best to wake up. Her attendants were alternately pinching and shaking her, but it was some time before her yawns ceased, and her eyes were prepared to keep open for a minute at a time.

'Now then, what is it?' she cried. 'How I do hate business!'

Thereupon Noisy Nan stepped forward and began her tale. Her shrill tones effectually dispelled any sleepy clouds that might still have hovered about Sleepyfay's brain. The little fairy was wide awake now, and anxious to undo the work of wicked old Grumblewitch.

She immediately called for her eagle and prepared to set forth. Nan was also to have a seat on the eagle's back, and Bounding Jack was to show the way. The quick motion through the air made Sleepyfay very drowsy. Her little fat body curled up, and her eyes disappeared, but Nan was on the watch, and as soon as she perceived the danger began to chatter with such vigour that her sharp shrill tones soon drove sleep to the right-about. And now they were drawing near to the old hag's abode. Nan had forgotten to warn Bounding Jack of venturing too near, lest Grumblewitch should be at home. It so happened that she was, and no sooner had she caught sight of Jack than she determined to turn him into a ball and sell him at the next fair. 'I shall get a long price for him,' she chuckled; and no sooner had imprudent Jack touched her ground than he was converted into a large bouncing india-rubber ball.

'Hush!' whispered Sleepyfay, as Nan gave vent to a shrill cry of dismay. 'We must be careful not to arouse her suspicions;' and she directed the eagle to fly away to a safe place out of sight.

'I must wait till night,' she said to Nan. 'It is only when Grumblewitch is asleep that I am stronger than she. Now, you must keep me awake, child,—pinch me, peck me, scream at me,—whatever you like in short, so that you don't let me sleep.' Nan undertook to do her best, and very hard work it was, and very cruel it seemed to pinch and peck poor little fat soft Sleepyfay, whenever she was comfortably falling into a doze. However, she did it, keeping up such a shrill chatter the while that the eagle, who had always held magpies in supreme detestation, was now more than ever persuaded that the race ought to be exterminated as quickly as possible. His only consolation was derived from the favourite saying of eagles—'Everything passeth away in time;' still it required all his philosophy to bear with the insufferable chatterbox. Unexpected relief came in the shape of a small cock-robin, with a very red breast, who was attracted to the spot by the shrill noise, and knowing no fear approached boldly within a few inches of the eagle's sharp beak.

'Why, what is all this row about?' he demanded.

'Ha! the very thing,' thought the eagle, a happy thought crossing his mind; 'now I can stop her chatter for a while;' and he commanded the robin to come nearer, and told Nan to be silent.

'If I cease chattering, Sleepyfay will go to sleep,' remonstrated Nan.

'Not if the Robin tells us a story,' answered the eagle; adding politely, 'Your voice and throat must really need some rest, Madam.'

'What story can a robin tell, I should like to know,' muttered Nan contemptuously, but she was rather afraid of the eagle, and did not like to make too strong objections.

'Don't let me go to sleep,' murmured Sleepyfay, 'Nan! Nan!'

'Madam,' said the eagle before Nan could reply, 'you shall be kept awake. You have often asked me why the robin has a red breast. Now you shall know, for here is a fine cock-robin, who will tell you the story which I never could do.'

'Well, I 'm sure, do you call this fair?' began the robin, inclined to bluster, 'how do you know I can tell a story? how—'

'You must obey your King,' said the eagle,

quietly cutting short his remonstrances, and the robin saw there was nothing for it but to obey; so hopping up to the little Sleepyfay, who, wide awake now, was as eager as a child for the story, he perched by her side, and peering with bright black eyes into her face, began as follows :—

'This is the tale that has been told to me by my parents, and which I in my turn shall hand down to my children. I don't understand it, and perhaps hardly believe it; neither will you, I daresay; and if I tell it you more after the fashion of a poll parrot than in the free and easy language of a robin, it is because I can only tell it you as it was told to me. Well, it is said that the first robin in the world was the only son of a brave warrior,—perhaps that fact accounts for our boldness;—he was changed into a bird in this manner. The warrior's son had come to the age when his personal spirit was to enter into him, and his father was anxious he should possess a great good and powerful spirit. This could only come to pass through great endurance and long fasting. The father then led his son into the forest, and after many instructions and plenty of good advice he

left him in a little hut which had been prepared for him, promising to visit him regularly every morning. In the hut was a new mat made of rushes woven by his mother. The young man laid himself upon it and covered his face. He lay still until the next morning, when his father arrived and tried to console him with kind and good words. Day after day passed without food, drink, or change of any kind. It was a dreary weary time for the poor warrior's son; and on the eighth day his strength failed so much that he lay as one without life. On the ninth day he entreated his father to let him break his fast and try again at another time. 'I have bad dreams, and have no strength to endure any longer,' he cried; 'let me for once eat and drink.'

'My son,' said his father, 'you have persevered for eight days, do not give up now that the worst is over. If you do, all will be lost. Only strive a little longer, and a brave bright spirit will come to you as your reward.'

The poor son covered his face again, and did not move or utter another word till the eleventh day, when in a faint voice he once

more entreated to be released from his misery. 'What! now when the time has all but passed?' said his father; 'no, no, to-morrow I will come early and bring you food. Only be patient a little longer and the victory is won.' The young man made no reply, he seemed even then as one dead. But for the gentle heaving of his breast, you would have said that life had fled.

Next morning, very early, came his father laden with food. On approaching the hut he heard sounds as of some one talking. Stooping and looking through a small opening, he saw, to his surprise, his son sitting up painting his shoulders and breast with red paint, and muttering to himself, 'My father has slain me. He would not listen to my entreaties. I have, however, been obedient beyond my strength, and so I shall be for ever happy, although the spirit which is come to me is not the one I sought.'

At this moment the poor old father rushed in, wailing, 'My son, my son, leave me not! oh leave me not!' But like a bird the lad flew up to the top of the hut, perching on the highest outer pole. And looking up at him his father saw that a bird indeed it was who sat there, for his

son had assumed the shape of a beautiful robin redbreast. Looking down at his father he said, 'Mourn not my change; I could not gratify your pride as a warrior, but I will cheer you by my songs; and as I shall always be the friend of man, so will I keep near their dwellings. I am now free from cares and pain. My food is given me by the trees and hedges; my path is in the bright air. Farewell,' and with these words he flew away to the green woods and high trees, leaving his poor old father gazing after him with out-stretched arms, crying piteously, 'My son, my son, why did I not listen to thee?'

'What nonsense,' muttered Nan as the story was ended, 'as if any one could believe such rubbish.'

'Why not?' said Sleepyfay; and thanking the robin for his tale, she added, 'Surely when everything is so strange around us, this story is not too extraordinary to believe. Come, Nan, don't be sulky, or you shall not regain your proper form; remember you can only do so with my help; and I don't like cross looks.'

Thus admonished, Nan recovered her good

humour, and again the ears of the poor eagle were pierced by her shrill chatter. The robin, glad to be released, was about to fly away, but the eagle entreated him for pity's sake to tell them one more story in order to stop Nan's tongue. 'It is still too early for our work to begin,' he urged, 'and my nerves will be ruined by this screeching magpie if she goes on much longer.'

'Why not tell a story yourself, great king?' suggested the bold robin.

The eagle almost consumed him with a flash of anger from his eyes. '*I* condescend to such a task? *I* waste my kingly breath in such fashion? Idiot! your impudence deserves punishment; but as I wish to make you useful I will pardon you. Go, do my bidding.'

There was nothing for it but obedience. The robin stifled a sigh of regret as he remembered the fat juicy worm that was to form his supper at home, and hopping back to Sleepyfay's side, he plunged into the following story of the ptarmigan:—

'Does the ptarmigan in its desolate mountain haunts ever wonder why it is so unlike other birds; grey in summer, white in winter,

with legs, feet, and toes completely and closely feathered down to the very claws? I know not; but we other birds have often wondered about it, and quite lately I have heard a legend which professes to account for these peculiarities.

'Once upon a time, when the world was very young, a great and powerful queen summoned every bird of the air to appear before her. They came—some proudly, others timidly, but all in ignorance of the fate that awaited them, for no sooner had they appeared before the queen than she commanded them to walk through a flaming fire that blazed brightly before them. Not daring to disobey the command, they all plunged boldly into the fire, with one exception, and that was the ptarmigan. Hoping among so many to escape notice, he flew into a tree, and, peering through the leaves, congratulated himself on his wisdom, when he saw that the feet of the other birds in passing through the flames were scorched to the skin, and would always remain so.

'The Queen, however, was perfectly aware that one bird had been disobedient, and before long the unfortunate ptarmigan was discovered.

Trembling in every limb, he let his wings and tail droop to the ground before the anger expressed in the Queen's face.

'"Harmless and defenceless, but the most timid among birds shalt thou be, persecuted every hour of thy life, frequenting the tops o mountains and high places for safety, and finding none." Such was the sentence its disobedience evoked. Too frightened to utter a sound, the wretched bird cowered before the Queen. Then the little peewit, a friend in need, lifted up its voice, and gave vent to the favourite saying of the peewits: "He that hath no mercy will not find mercy himself."

'The Queen was not offended by the little bird's audacity, nay, more, seemed pleased at its brave fidelity.

'"Thou art right," she said, "and this mercy will I vouchsafe to the ptarmigan as a slight protection against its foes; the colour of its plumage shall change according to the seasons, in summer to a brownish grey similar to the mists on the mountain heights; in winter to white, so that it may be then undistinguishable from the pure undriven snow, and have the chance of escaping death."

'Thenceforth the motto of the ptarmigan has been this—

'"The further from man the happier I."

Almost before the last words had fallen from his beak the robin had soared into the air, so frightened was he lest more stories should be demanded of him. It was now, however, time to commence work, and Sleepyfay was all eagerness to begin operations. The field of action was soon reached; all was quiet there, Grumblewitch, Jan, and their victims were enjoying deep unbroken slumbers. The first thing to be done was to throw the old Grumblewitch into a still deeper sleep, and this was accomplished by a few whispered words in her ear. Then began the work of disenchantment, and a curious scene it was. Sleepyfay moved about waving her little fat hands, and muttering in an unknown tongue; then very soon the place became thickly peopled with human beings. The roses turned into beautiful princesses, the pinks into dandies, the violets into timid little village maidens, and the lilies into stately dames. Only two beds of flowers did Sleepyfay leave enchanted—the peonies and the heartseases. For the peonies were cross, tipsy

red-faced old cooks, and the heartseases *cruel* old stepmothers. So it would have been a pity to have set them at liberty.

If you turn the heartsease upside down you will see how well it represents a cruel stepmother of the olden times. Now-a-days there is no such thing, of course. Look at this fat portly petal clad in some gaudy colour, here she is! Now, turn her round, and you will see she has two green points—the petals of the calix—to her bodice. On each side of her stand her own daughters, who are also dressed very gaily in fashionable gowns of the same colour front and back, and they each have a pretty green point. But now only look at those two poor elder girls in their dingy dresses of brown or dusty purple. How dowdy they are! How dejected they look! How weak their backs seem! Only *one* point have they between them, poor things, which they are obliged to sew on and cut off alternately. These are the stepdaughters, and very miserable they look. Now, did not Sleepyfay shew discernment in leaving these two beds of flowers undisturbed?

It was now time to turn her attention to

Bounding Jack and Noisy Nan, who very soon resumed their proper forms, but as soon as Talkative Jim was disenchanted, the uproar became so dreadful that Sleepyfay turning to Jack entreated him as a favour to bound off with the two chatterboxes, and before they knew where they were he had tucked one under each arm and bounded off with them over walls, gates, hedges, and ditches, till a safe distance was gained; then without waiting to listen to their indignant complaints, he just dropped them upon the ground and bounded away to his own particular country. Sleepyfay was puzzled how to dispose of Jan. At length she decided on turning him into a cringeing ugly cur whose bark should be worse than his bite. And now her task was at length finished, and all power had for ever passed away from Grumblewitch by reason of her having been caught napping. Feeling quite worn out with her exertions, tired little Sleepyfay mounted the eagle's back, and long before reaching home, was in a sound and comfortable slumber.

Meanwhile Grumblewitch slept on heavily, notwithstanding that an ill-conditioned cur was barking and snarling at her bedside. And

when at length she slowly and painfully awoke to consciousness, it was to find a scene of devastation indeed!

'Jan, Jan, come here,' she cried and then shrieked aloud as her eyes fell on the dog, and she saw it was her old servant. Rushing into the garden she found it a desert save for the red peonies and heartseases who were quarrelling noisily over the events of the night. From them she learnt all that had happened, and knew that Sleepyfay alone could have worked such mischief.

'It is all the fault of that magpie; how could I have been so foolish as to overlook her right eye!' she muttered, hobbling back into the house preparatory to flight, for she dared not stay any longer, fearing that as soon as the day was somewhat advanced the relations and friends of her late victims would seek for her and fall upon her. So she and Jan sneaked out by the back door and crept along under shelter of high hedges and deep ditches. And to their wanderings we will leave them, a miserable pair, fit company for each other, but happily unable any longer to work ill to others.

LITTLE MAX AND HIS WINGS.

LITTLE MAX AND HIS WINGS.

AT the entrance of a beautiful forest lived little Max; in it were green glades and grassy slopes where the hares and rabbits scampered to and fro from dawn till dusk. A tall straight fir with wide-spreading top stood apart from the other trees, close by the cottage where Max dwelt, and took it as it were under its protection. Max had grown to love the tree, and never cared to wander far from its shade and shelter.

Not only did *he* love

the tree, but the birds of the air loved it too, better than any tree in the forest; its branches were ever ready to receive them in fair or foul weather, and would close round them lovingly in either case.

'Would that I had wings,' little Max would sigh, looking up at the tree, 'then I too could come to thee.'

'Thy wings when they come must carry thee higher, little Max; wait and see.' It was the eagle who, soaring overhead, heard his wail and answered it thus.

'But will they come? Shall I have wings?' cried the boy, trembling with hope and joy. 'Oh eagle, eagle! do not deceive me.'

'Wait and see; wait and see,' was all the the eagle would say.

Max threw himself on the grass, sobbing. Then the tree gave a gentle rustle and a dove flew softly down and nestled lovingly by the boy. 'Coo, coo,' she said, and the boy caressed her, but still sobbed on. 'Coo, coo, coo,' so soothingly that at length Max was quieted. 'Dear little dove, stay with me,' he said, and the dove nestled on his shoulder and whispered in his ear till the boy's face grew calm and peaceful

again. For while she cooed so softly and so sweetly, good and holy thoughts crept into his heart and he felt that they alone could make his wings grow. He was no longer in doubt on the matter, but knew that if he were only good, gentle and obedient, his wish would be gratified.

His mother's voice called him, the dove with one last loving 'coo' left him, and the boy springing up obeyed the call.

'Oh, mother, mother!' and rushing into her arms he told her all that was in his heart. The mother trembled as she listened, and clasped her boy closer to her breast. Too well she knew that to her and to his father the wings would mean separation. She knew that if they grew he could no longer stay with them, but must perforce soar upwards. Whither? Ah! that thought she did not follow; the grief of losing her boy alone filled her mind.

'Oh Max! oh my son! must you have wings? must you leave us?' she cried.

'Yes, dear mother, I long for them. Oh, do not grieve! some day you will see that it must be.'

'Ah, it all comes of your love for that big

tree and the birds that visit it. They have stolen my boy's heart from me;' and the poor mother threw her apron over her face and went crying into the house. Max saw he could not comfort her at present, so he busied himself in drawing water, collecting wood, and doing many little things to help his mother. His father was a woodcutter, and was out early and late in the forest, and every morning before he left home he told Max to be a good boy, and to do all he could for his mother.

That same evening, as Max was lying down in his bed, he felt a strange feeling in his shoulders, and putting up his hand found that his wings were indeed growing. His cry of joy and amazement caused his mother to hurry into the room, and then was heard another cry, but this one was full of sadness. She hurried back weeping to her husband, and the two sat over the fire far into the night,—for they were too miserable to go to bed,—and talked of their boy and the pain of losing him.

'Is there no hope, none, none?' sighed the mother, as she stared into the dying embers.

'Yes,' said a voice, but it was not her husband who spoke; a little flame leaped up from

the fire, and showed them a dwarf seated among the ashes. 'It will be your own fault if you let your boy leave you. Obey me, and his wings will never grow.'

'Oh husband, husband, do you hear his words?' said the mother, trembling half with fear, and clinging to her husband's arm.

'Yes, Joan, I hear, but I am no friend to the small folk, as you know. Now, sir, begone, if you please, and you, Joan, come to bed.'

The dwarf laughed hideously. 'Never mind, I can wait, I can wait,' and with that he disappeared; the embers died out suddenly, and the woodcutter and his wife were left in perfect darkness. 'Oh, why did you send him away?' she cried, 'now we shall lose our boy.'

'Better lose him by fair means than keep him by foul means,' answered her husband; 'that dwarf meant no good, I 'll be bound. Now, come to bed, wife, or I shall be fit for no work to-morrow.'

But there was no sleep for Joan that night.

Once or twice she rose, and creeping into the little room where her boy lay, watched him as he slept. The look of peace and happiness on his face ought to have brought balm to her

troubled heart. Not to-night, however, for the words of the dwarf were still influencing her mind, '*Obey me, and his wings will never grow.*' And now her husband had sent him off with harsh words, and she could never benefit by his advice. Joan forgot that evil, unhappily, is ever lurking near.

Next morning Max was up at an early hour, leaping and frisking about like a young kid.

'Oh you dear beautiful tree,' he cried aloud, patting the rough bark caressingly, 'I shall soon come to you now; listen, my wings have begun to grow, and soon, very soon, I shall fly up to you and nestle in your branches as the birds do. Ah! how beautiful it must be up there,' and he held out his arms lovingly to the tree.

'No, no, *you* must soar higher, higher,' again said the eagle, who, sailing overhead, had caught the boy's words.

'Max,' cried his mother in a voice sharp from grief, 'do not stand idling there; I want a hundred things done.'

'I come, dear mother,' said the boy, obeying instantly; and Joan kept him so hard at work all day that he had no more time to chatter

to his dear tree, or even to hear one 'coo' from the little dove.

For all that, as soon as her husband had come home Joan told him that she wanted the large tree near the cottage cut down.

'Mother!' almost screamed Max; and the woodcutter, taking his pipe from his mouth, stared at his wife, wondering if she had taken leave of her senses. 'Cut down the large tree!' he said slowly.

'Ay, why not? then Max would not be for ever idling round it chattering rubbish and encouraging all these birds about the place.'

'No, not one would stay if their dear home was taken away,' said Max sorrowfully; 'but mother, mother, you couldn't do it;—oh, it would kill me.'

'Joan, get supper ready, will you? I think you have taken leave of your wits to-night, woman.'

'Ay, ay, that's ever the way; nobody ever thinks of the mother's heart,' she muttered, turning away to obey her husband.

'Never fear, Max,' said his father, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder kindly, 'thy tree shall not be felled; make thy mind easy; and

now help thy mother.' This Max gladly did.

Every night to his great joy he felt his wings were growing more and more, and every night the poor mother would come in, feel them, give a cry of anguish, and turn away sobbing.

The words of the dwarf never left her mind; and one day her misery was so great that she determined, if possible, to make him reappear. She said nothing to her husband, but at night, when he was fast asleep and in no fear of waking, she rose quietly, went into the kitchen, and raked together the dying embers. Then gazing into them, all her heart in her eyes, she called earnestly on the little dwarf to appear.

Her appeal seemed in vain, he did not come; and in despair she was turning away when a tiny flame shot up, a mocking laugh was heard, and there, on the top bar of the grate, sat the mannikin. And now Joan trembled so much she could not speak. 'Hey! are you a fool, woman? Why did you call me out of my first sleep if you have nothing to say? Make haste, the fire is going out, and I must go with it.'

'You know what I would ask,' gasped Joan; 'tell me how to keep my boy with me.'

'I thought as much,' chuckled the dwarf maliciously, 'so luckily for you I came provided with the remedy. Here, take this little box, it contains ointment which you must rub on the wings every night when he is asleep. They will soon disappear, ha! ha!'

'Promise me he will not suffer,' entreated Joan, 'that no harm—.'

But the dwarf had disappeared; the last vestige of red had left the embers, and no answer came to Joan's cry. She went softly into her boy's room, and ascertained he was in a sound happy sleep. Then she opened the little pot. It contained bright red ointment. Some of this she took on her fingers, and trembling so that she could scarcely stand, managed to smear it on his shoulders without waking him. Then without looking at him again she crept back to bed, where she lay frightened and sleepless, thinking of what she had done.

Next morning Max was up early as usual, drawing water and collecting wood, but his father missed his customary song and merry laugh over his work.

'Max, boy, is anything wrong?' he asked; for he thought perhaps his mother might have

vexed him again about the tree and the birds. 'No father, thank you, only a little pain here,' and he put up his hand to his shoulder; 'it will soon go off, I daresay; say nothing to mother.'

But the pain grew worse as the day went on, and Max, when his work was done, lay languidly at the foot of his beloved tree, and the dove nestled close to him, cooing softly, to comfort him. The boy stroked her feathers and kissed her, but he did not talk about his wings to-day; he was strangely still and quiet.

'What ails Max?' asked his father uneasily of Joan when the boy had gone to bed, 'he seems so heavy and unlike himself.'

She flushed crimson, and busied herself in clearing away supper. 'Indeed I do not know; he has been rather quieter perhaps, otherwise much the same, it seems to me.'

That evening Joan again crept into the boy's room. This time when she was rubbing on the ointment he moaned piteously, though he did not wake. The pot almost fell from his mother's hand, and she felt inclined to abandon her project, but the selfish fear of losing her boy was uppermost, and overcame the better thought. As the days came and went Joan fancied she

could see a reproachful look in her boy's eyes when they were turned on her; and his heavy step and changed appearance could not but grieve her heart. She thought, however, he would soon recover, and would not listen to the inner voice which bade her beware. It was rare now for Max to chatter to his dear tree or to the birds.

The eagle flew restlessly hither and thither, and wondered what was amiss; and the little dove cooed sorrowfully as she whispered the secret to the tree, for somehow she knew what had happened.

Joan thought it strange that Max never now spoke of his wings. Surely he must know that they were no longer growing. Ah yes, he knew it well enough; and more, *he knew the reason.*

And this was why he shrank from talking to the tree and to the birds, and did not wish the dove to nestle near his heart. It was such a black terrible secret, and he must keep it to himself. Whenever his father was present he tried to be cheerful and bright as before, but the father saw there was a difference, and often asked what ailed him. 'Is it because his wings are growing?' he would sometimes ask Joan,

who evaded the question as often as she could. There were now no longer any signs of the wings to be seen. The red ointment had scorched them quite away.

Every day the mother hoped the boy would brighten up, jump, and run about as of old, but as day after day passed and he only grew more and more quiet, she began to ask herself what she had done. Had her wicked selfishness changed her bright beautiful boy into a sickly invalid? Had she kept him with her only to take all happiness out of his life? She began to fear so; and, remorse once awakened, her life became a misery to her. At length she could bear it no longer, and with many tears confessed to her husband what she had done. He was of course very angry with her, and very unhappy as well, so unhappy that sleep was impossible that night, and getting up he went softly into Max's room to see if he were asleep.

The moon, shining on to the bed, lighted up the poor little fellow's face, which was bathed in tears.

'Max, my boy, are you in pain?' asked his father anxiously.

The boy started, and buried his face in the

bed-clothes, but his father raised him gently, put the boy's head on his shoulder, and asked him why he was fretting.

'Oh father, I can't tell you,' was all he would answer.

'Is it because your wings are no longer growing? I know all about it, my boy.'

'Not all!' cried Max with a startled look; 'not about mo——,' here he checked himself.

'Yes, my poor boy; mother has told me all.'

'Poor mother; she is so unhappy,' sighed Max. 'I know she is, and I could not tell her that I knew she had done it; it was so terrible. Oh take me to mother, I want to kiss her.'

The mother was already with him. Unable to sleep, she had followed her husband and heard all that had passed. Now her arms were round her boy, her tears fell like rain upon him and washed away all trace of the red ointment from his shoulders.

Next day Max was well enough to lie under the shade of the tree and listen once more to the song of the birds.

'You are coming, you are coming,' shouted the eagle, and the little skylarks took up the cry, warbling it high up into the heavens. The

dove nestled once more near his heart and cooed to him that all would now be well owing to his mother's tears of repentance.

His wings grew and grew; still he could not tell when he should fly away.

Joan's eyes were often fixed on him with a wistful yearning look; but she knew her boy must leave her, and she would not now have kept him back.

Still it almost broke her heart when, going into his room one morning, she found the little bed empty. She glanced round, the window was open, and then she knew what had happened. Uttering a little cry she ran out of doors, thinking he might yet be in sight; but no Max was visible.

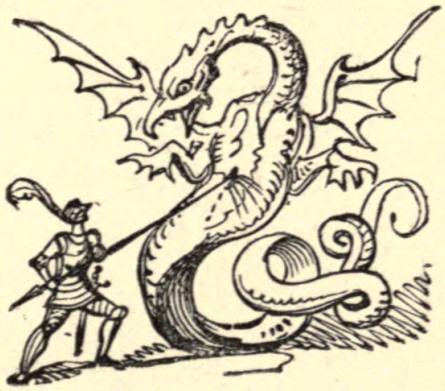
It was a glorious morning. Never had the sun seemed to her to shine so brightly, and the tree—Max's tree that he so loved—stood nobler and straighter than ever. The sky was alive with birds, who seemed to have gathered together for a purpose.

'Max! Max!' cried the poor mother, 'have you gone? Shall I never see you again? Oh my boy! my boy!'

The tree rustled compassionately, and the

dove, the radiance of her eyes dimmed as she witnessed the mother's grief, flew into her breast, and it seemed to Joan that the meaning of her soft cooing was this—

'Where Max has gone all can follow, who keep their hearts white and pure.'



DREAM OR NO DREAM.

DREAM OR NO DREAM.

DON'T understand him one bit,' said the mother, 'he is always trying to perform impossibilities.' The neighbour to whom this speech was addressed, a blunt, homely woman, replied, 'Then why are you always putting impossibilities into his head, friend Nancy?'

'I!' cried Nancy, 'I don't do so, leastways my words wouldn't have that effect on any sensible mortal. No, mark my words, Joan, he's no child of mine, he's a changeling; and I may as well try to wash a blackamoor white as try to change him.'

'There now! Suppose he had heard you say that?'

'Bless you, he did hear me say it the other day, and off he rushed to poor old Tuesday, the halfwitted black, who sweeps the crossing. He dragged him into the barn yonder, promised him some sweet stuff if he would stand quiet, and then began to scrub him from head to foot with all his might and main!'

'Well,' laughed Joan, 'didn't I say you put the ideas into his head by your way of speaking? However, old Tuesday's washing did him no harm, I 'll be bound.'

'Perhaps not; but the boy was nearly the death of the old sow the other day.'

'Indeed?'

'Ay, he heard me say to father, when he was grumbling over old Joe's awkwardness, "Never mind, you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," and what must Hugo do but rush off to the stye with a needle and thread and a pair of scissors, and I do believe if I hadn't run after him he would have chopped off the poor creature's ear in no time. And he 's not a cruel boy either. No, no, there 's something strange about him; he is not right in his head, or else he is a changeling. The number of silly things he has tried to do!

Why, would you believe it, the other day he went off hunting for a mare's nest! Did you ever hear of such a boy?'

Nancy could not say she had ever before come across so singular a boy; and the sole advice that she could give his mother was to speak good sensible English and not be so fond of what she called 'queer-fangled proverbs and phrases,' which only set the boy off thinking and wondering. Use, however, is second nature; and Joan found it difficult to adopt a simpler style of speech. The consequence was, there came a day when she came weeping and wailing to Nancy to tell her that the boy had run off, and that this time she should never see him again, for he had gone on a worse wild-goose chase than ever, and had left word that he should not come home till he had bitten a little piece out of the moon.

Nancy lifted her hands in amazement. 'Is the lad stark staring mad? What ever could have put that into his head?'

'My foolish words, I suppose,' sobbed Joan. 'I was skinning an eel yesterday, and the slippery thing slid through my fingers so often that at last I cried out, "One might as well try

to take hold of the moon with one's teeth as try to hold this creature." Hugo was somewhere near and overheard me; and now he has gone off to try and get hold of the moon, and I shall never see—see—him—again.' The poor mother threw her apron over her head and sobbed bitterly.

'Come, cheer up, neighbour,' said Joan, 'you mustn't be so downcast; maybe he will soon be back again; he has gone on a fruitless errand, and the boy will soon have the sense to find out so much for himself.' But the poor mother refused to be comforted; and could she have seen the condition of Hugo at that moment, her feelings of fear and anxiety would have reached despair, for her boy had just been swallowed by a big red bull.

He had wandered off more with a vague idea of doing something wonderful than with any real idea of reaching the moon. To achieve what others called an impossibility was his ambition. That he lived in a land also inhabited by fairies and witches he felt certain, although he had very often been assured there were no such creatures. Hugo however knew better: something told him they did exist, although

they might not be visible to all eyes. He had not gone far before he saw a fine red bull grazing in a meadow. His mother often spoke of a 'cock and bull story;' and he thought it would be a fine opportunity to question the bull on the subject. Again, he had heard her talk of 'taking the bull by the horns;' and advancing boldly he seized the animal with both hands and requested he would tell him the story. The bull roared, bellowed, kicked, and butted, but could not get rid of Hugo, who clung on like a vice, although he was often lifted up high in the air, and you would have thought his grasp must have given way. But it did not. At length the bull was inspired with the happy thought of swallowing his tormentor since he could get rid of him in no other way. So opening his huge mouth and tossing his head wildly he managed to catch hold of Hugo's feet and the unfortunate boy felt himself being drawn slowly but surely down the bull's throat. He screamed and begged for mercy, but it was too late, and as he slid down the red gulf he fortunately lost consciousness, and knew no more until, waking, he found himself in a pleasant-looking place

grass. 'Where am I?' he exclaimed aloud; and a feeble little voice answered, 'Inside the big red bull.' 'Who spoke?' he asked amazed. 'Mrs. Manypetalled Daisy' was the answer; and turning his head he saw close at hand a very fine tuft of daisies, with a strong-stemmed matron daisy in the centre.

'*You, you* spoke?' he exclaimed in surprise.

'Why not?' answered the daisy; 'Bull-land is not like the earth you have just left; though for the matter of that, daisies *can* speak and be understood there too by some folks.'

'Is it long since you left earth?' asked Hugo.

'Yes, some time now; I *was* in a fright when the bull swallowed me; for, of course, I expected to be chopped into little nothings by his huge teeth, and that my poor children would share my fate, but to my surprise he just caught up the plot on which we were growing and slipped us down his throat in the most comfortable manner; and here you see we have taken root and live much more comfortably, because in greater safety than we did on earth.'

'It is very strange,' muttered Hugo, getting up and beginning to walk about, 'I can move about here as well as I could on

earth; and it is just as light and just as large. I wonder what mother would say if she could see me now. She would have to confess I was right when I talked of fairies and suchlike, but I suppose she would never believe me if I told her I had been walking about inside a red bull. Some people *are* so disbelieving. Well, here I am, there is no mistake about it, and perhaps here I may learn how I am to get hold of the moon. I must try and find out, for I am determined to do something wonderful before I go home.' Hugo wandered on, wondering at each step that Bull-land was so like the earth he had just quitted. To be sure, in one sense it was different, for every tree, plant, and animal could speak to him and he could understand their language. 'Am I the only mortal here?' he thought; 'it will be rather dull work if that is so;' but his mind was soon relieved on that point, for on turning a corner he came upon a bright-looking little house and a pretty garden, where the flowers looked up as he drew near and smiled a welcome.

'How happy you all look!' he said.

'No wonder,' answered the flowers, 'we

such care of us, and we love her so much.

'What is her name?' asked Hugo.

'We call her Sylvia. Here she comes.' Hugo looked towards the small dwelling and saw a beautiful little creature coming towards him. He had never seen any one so pretty before; and I am afraid he stared rather rudely at her. She did not seem surprised to see him, but only asked how he had arrived in Bull-land.

'The bull swallowed me,' he answered awkwardly.

'Poor bull! he must have been nearly choked,' she said, laughing prettily, and the bell-flowers chimed in softly.

'Oh no,' said Hugo; 'he seemed to be quite accustomed to such large mouthfuls; the discomfort was all mine, I think. Does he then as a rule only swallow pretty maidens and lovely flowers?'

Sylvia blushed at the compliment, and the white flowers thought it only proper to assume a rosy flush for the moment to show that they also appreciated it. Sylvia answered, 'As far as I know, you and I are the only mortals in Bull-land at present. I have been here a

long time, ever since I was quite a child. My cruel stepmother, hearing that the bull swallowed little children, put me down in front of him one day, and in a very few minutes I had ceased to trouble her. There was an old woman here then who took care of me and taught me to take care of myself, but one day she disappeared. Two or three people have appeared now and then, but they have not come much in my way. Pray, why did you leave your home ?'

Hugo grew very red. 'I am afraid you will hardly understand the reason if I tell it you.' Somehow he felt ashamed to tell Sylvia his wild notions.

'Try,' laughed the maiden; 'perhaps you had a cruel stepmother.'

'Oh no; the kindest of mothers.'

'Indeed! Was she not very much grieved at losing you ?'

Hugo hung his head. 'I came away without wishing her good-bye.'

Sylvia said nothing, and Hugo felt her silence meant displeasure. And looking at the flowers, he saw their heads drooping and knew that they also condemned him.

'How could you be so cruel?' at last Sylvia said.

'I thought she would try and prevent my going; and—and—I did so want to do something that other people thought impossible.'

'Why?' asked Sylvia; but to this question Hugo could give no answer.

'Will you tell me what it was you wanted to do so much?' Hugo hung his head; his eyes were becoming open to the folly of his conduct, and he felt how silly his answer would seem. Still the idea of saying anything but the truth never occurred to him.

'I—I wanted to—to—' a long pause.

'Well?' said Sylvia encouragingly.

'To—to take hold of the moon with my teeth,' and Hugo held his crimsoned face still lower.

The bell-flowers could not restrain from a light ringing laugh; their hearts are always merry, and the idea seemed so absurd to them. Their mistress, however, took the matter more seriously. 'And you left your poor mother for this folly,' she cried, 'never even bidding her good-bye? I can scarcely believe it. Have you ever thought since of her tears and sorrow?'

'No. You see I—I have hardly had much

time for thinking,' stammered out poor Hugo. 'The first thing I did was to take the bull by the horns, and then he swallowed me.'

'The only thing he could do to get rid of you, I suppose,' said Sylvia; 'and perhaps on the whole the very best thing that could have happened to you. There are no impossibilities for you to perform here. Come inside my house and I will show you some pictures which ought to touch your heart.'

She led the way inside, and Hugo followed, feeling very much ashamed of himself. The touch of scorn in Sylvia's voice had somehow made him understand the poor part he had played in leaving his mother so unkindly. His eyes seemed suddenly opened, and he began to think how little he had ever done for her, and how much he might have done if he had not always been wrapped up in his foolish dreams.

Sylvia led him into a darkened room, put him into a chair, and passing her hands lightly over his eyes said, 'You have often, I daresay, heard your mother speak of seeing through a stone wall; you shall see through a great deal more than that.' She then murmured some words that were unintelligible to Hugo and

left him alone in the dark. Very soon a picture appeared on the opposite wall and he had not much difficulty in recognising his old home. Yes! there it was, just as he had left it in the morning, with the old bent apple-tree laden with fruit, standing as sentry in front of it. But who is this weeping woman who comes slowly up to the door, her face buried in her apron? She turns round and Hugo knows that face of anxiety to belong to his mother. He starts forward to comfort her, but it is only a picture and he cannot touch her figure. She enters the cottage wearily, soon reappearing with a pitcher in her hand, and he knows she is going to the well for water. A voice seems to whisper in his ear, 'Ought she, at her age and in weak health, to have this to do?' and his conscience tells him he ought to be at her side. Then he sees her return tottering under the weight of the full pitcher, and again he springs forward, feeling he *must* take it from her; but although the picture has such a life-like appearance, everything fades away as he approaches, and again he falls back, disappointed. It was a grief to him to watch her tottering steps and the weary look in her face,

and to remember that everything he had been in the habit of doing for her she must now either do herself or ask help from a neighbour, for his grandfather was too infirm to render any assistance.

'What was I thinking about when I went away?' muttered Hugo; 'how could I be so cruel and so childish at the same time?'

Sylvia was close to him, although he could not see her, and she heard his words with much satisfaction. She did not spare him one pang. All that his poor old mother did that evening was faithfully represented, and poor Hugo's agony at being compelled to be a passive looker-on, and feel that it was all his fault, was almost too great to bear. It reached its culminating point when, supper over, his mother climbed the steep staircase to his own little bedroom, which she busied herself in putting to rights as far as her tears and fatigue would allow. But when he saw her take up a coat he had left behind, and press her lips to it tenderly again and again, while a fresh flood of grief overcame her, he could bear it no longer, and springing forward he called out, 'Mother! mother!' dashing himself against the life-like picture

with such force that he fell to the ground stunned.

When Hugo again opened his eyes he found himself in a sunny meadow that seemed strangely familiar to him, and looking round perceived, to his great surprise, his old friend the large red bull quietly grazing at a little distance.

'Why!' he exclaimed, raising himself, and leaning on his elbow to take a better look, 'That is the very bull that swallowed me! How did I escape from his country, I wonder?' Then suddenly everything rushed back into his mind, and he started up as he remembered the grief he had seen his mother indulge in over the loss of her son. 'I can't make it out, it is all very wonderful,' he thought, as he ran off home, casting a wistful glance at the bull as he passed, but not daring to go up to him, for he had had quite enough of 'taking the bull by the horns.' 'You look a very ordinary animal feeding away there; who would think of all the wonderful things that go on inside you! That Sylvia *must* have been a fairy. How else could she have shown me those wonderful pictures? Ah, well! I suppose I shall never

see her again.' His mother was in the kitchen as he entered. At the sound of his voice she turned round and uttered a joyful exclamation. 'You have thought better of it, then, and have come home!' she cried. 'I have been very miserable about you, Hugo.'

'I know you have, mother, and I am thoroughly ashamed of myself; but all I have gone through, and all I have seen, has quite cured me of my foolish dreams, and I will be a good son to you at last.'

'All you have gone through, and all you have seen,' repeated his mother, staring at him; 'what do you mean? Why, it is only two hours since you went off, and left this note for me,' drawing a crumpled paper from her pocket.

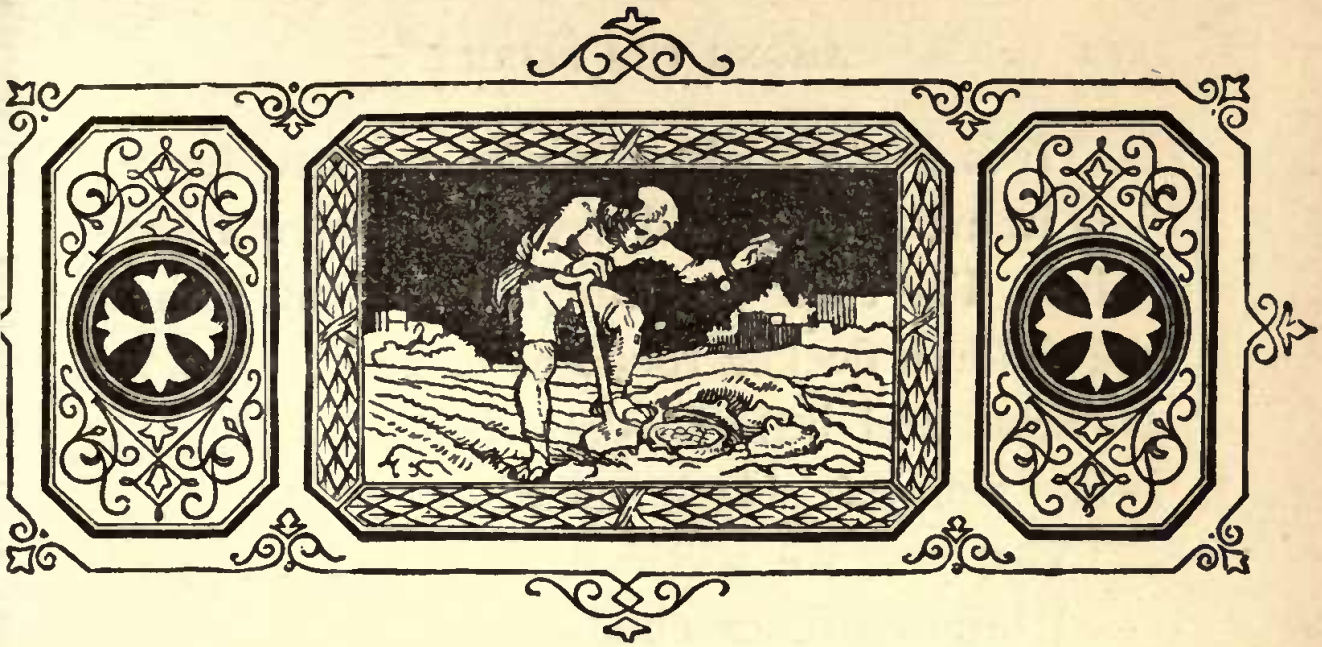
'Mother! Why, it was yesterday morning, or longer still, for there is little count of time where I have been.' And then he told his mother all his adventures. She could not help laughing at his description of how he had literally taken the bull by the horns, and at his belief that he had been walking about inside the animal; but her mirth turned to tears when he described the pictures Sylvia had

shown him, and the feelings of remorse which had seized him on witnessing his mother's grief. She threw her arms round his neck, and felt that now indeed she had a son instead of a Will-o'-the-Wisp, as she used to call him. 'But, my lad,' she said, 'there are no fairies in the case. Don't you see what has happened to you? The bull, finding he could get rid of you no other way, gave you a gentle toss, for he is a good-natured animal, and would not hurt you if he could help it. You fell on the soft grass slightly stunned, and went to sleep, and dreamt all this about Sylvia and the pictures. Why, it 's only two hours since you left the house; that ought to convince you.'

Hugo shook his head; it was all too real to him to be disposed of in this fashion. Of course it was very strange if, as his mother said, he had only been absent two hours. Still, strange or not, to his last day he would never give up the belief that he had been into Bull-land, and that in that unknown country there dwelt a lovely little creature called Sylvia, who had shown him the error of his ways, and turned him into a good attentive son. However, he did not now, as he would have done formerly,

dispute the subject with his mother; and when she said to him, 'It was only a dream, lad; but never mind, it was a rare good one,' he only bent his head and kissed her old withered cheek, saying, 'But it shall turn out better than my old dreams, mother; and you, at any rate, shall have reason to bless Sylvia, fairy or no fairy.'

THE ENCHANTED CHAIR.



THE ENCHANTED CHAIR.

DOWN in the depths of an old German Jew pawnbroker's shop the arm-chair was found. It had white painted legs, and was covered with an old black brocaded silk, patched and frayed in many places.

A young wife was looking about for a comfortable chair for her husband on his return from work, and the old Jew strongly recommended this chair to her notice. 'You could not find anything better,' he said; 'see how well stuffed it is and how deep the back

is. It is worth double the money I ask for it. Buy it, ma'am, you will never repent your bargain.' The chair was bought and sent home; the children flocked round to examine the new purchase, and little Bertha cried out, 'Why, it is like a magpie, black and white!'

'Yes, yes, we will call it father's magpie,' cried the two other children. Little did they know what they were doing in giving the chair a nickname. It had come originally from the abode of a wizard; and oh! the trouble and anxiety that chair had been to numbers of people. At midnight it had the power of changing its form, if unoccupied, and it was compelled to take that of the bird, beast, or fish whose name it first heard on entering a house. Last time it had been a cat, and as such had committed every kind of depredation and mischief in the dead of night. The milk-jug would be found overturned, its contents gone, tit-bits of meat stolen, plates and glasses mysteriously broken; and the mistress of the house little knew how true it was when her servants, for want of a culprit, invariably put the blame on 'the cat.'

At length the mysterious and invisible cat

ruined the poor people and they were obliged to sell their furniture. Now the chair was to be a magpie, and here was a wide field opened for mischief and destruction.

'Oh what a comfortable chair!' exclaimed the hard-worked master of the house, stretching out his legs and leaning back in it with a sigh of satisfaction. 'How delightfully soft it is! How well stuffed! Yes, this is something like a chair.'

'Look, father,' cried Elsie, the eldest girl; 'look at this silver thimble. It was given me as a prize for good sewing to-day at school. Isn't it bright and pretty; and see, there is "For a Good Girl" engraved on it.'

'And a good girl you are to have earned it,' said her father; 'come and sit with me in the nice new chair, and I will tell you a story as a further reward.'

'Oh, a story! a story! Let us hear it too,' cried the other children, Bertha and Willie, running up.

'Oh children, let poor father rest, he is so tired,' said their mother. But what child can forego the delights of a story?

'Are you *very* tired, father,' asked little Willie,

in a tone which said plainly, 'Oh *please* say no,' and his father, smiling, gave him the wished-for answer.

'The magpie will rest, father,' lisped little Bertha; 'dear old magpie,' and she patted the arm of the chair with her small fat hand.

'Now what story shall I tell you?' asked father; and one wished for this, and one for another, till it ended in three stories being told instead of one; then the children were carried off to bed and the parents remained alone.

'Now take a nap, you have had a hard day's work,' said the wife; but her husband said he felt too restless and wide awake—very tired, yes; but not as if he could sleep. So before long they went to bed and the chair was left to begin its new life in its new home. It looked round on its companions and found them humble enough, for these are not grand folks of whom I am telling you, but a hard-working clerk and his wife, and their worldly goods were few, for they had only just enough to live upon, and the money for the new chair had been scraped together the wife best knew how. A plain deal table covered with a red cloth, a few cane-bottomed chairs, an old horse-

hair couch, and a Dutch clock, formed the furniture of the sitting-room. The clock ticked on, it wanted but a few minutes to midnight; and the chair grew more and more restless. The sober deal table and the simple-minded chairs, to whom it was as some strange exotic, stared in astonishment at its antics. It tilted up one leg after the other, heaved to and fro, shook with ill-concealed impatience, while as the hands of the clock pointed to the hour of twelve, the horse-hair couch imagined a chattering noise to come from it. And now the clock is striking and the room is filled with strange sounds, whirring and fluttering of wings; and what is the amazement, not to say dread, of the simple-minded furniture when the arm-chair suddenly changes into a huge magpie, which hops up on to the table and begins pluming its feathers and chattering, 'Oh dear, oh dear! what a poor wretched place my master has sent me to now! How bare and miserable! *Deal* chairs, a *Dutch* clock! Ho! ho! ho! This will never do; and there is nothing to hide. How can any magpie pick up an honest livelihood in such surroundings? Not a silver

At this moment something shining on the floor attracted his eye, and down from the table he jumped to hop after his prey. 'A silver thimble! Ah yes, it belongs to that little chattering child. Well, I must take it, there's no help for it; she will cry, I suppose, but it can't be helped,' and he hid poor little Elsie's prize under his wing, then hopped about looking for some other thing to secrete. In vain did the furniture by groans and creaks try to awaken their master and mistress, they could not make sufficient noise,—it is only furniture of a certain age and long pedigree that has the power and privilege of uttering those strange uncanny sounds, which when heard in the dead of night make us draw the bed-clothes closer round us, and perchance hide our heads under them. In vain did the clock try to tick louder; its dear old voice was too familiar to disturb the sleepers. The magpie had it all its own way, but there was little to have, it thought. Into the kitchen it hopped, picking up every stray crumb it could find, and finishing the modest remains of cheese that had been put aside for the following day. There seemed nothing left to thieve for the discontented bird, who after

hopping several times round the place, at length perched in front of the ashes of the dying fire, and putting its head under its wing, went to sleep till the hour came for it again to assume the form of a chair. In the early morning when the little maid-of-all-work crept down-stairs to light the kitchen fire and dust and sweep out the rooms, there stood the arm-chair, looking as impassive and ready to be sat upon as is the nature of chairs;—who would have dreamt of the antics that had taken place in the night?

All went as usual till breakfast was over and father had set off to his work. 'Now, Elsie,' said the mother, 'as it is a holiday at school, you must help me. First we will wash up the breakfast things, and then you shall get your new thimble and do some plain sewing.'

'Yes, mother,' said Elsie cheerfully. 'Bertha, will you bring me my thimble, please? I left it in the sitting-room last night; then I shall be quite ready to begin as soon as these cups are washed.'

Little Bertha ran off to do her sister's bidding, but very soon they heard her voice from the next room crying out that there

'Nonsense,' said Elsie, 'it must be there.'

'Why didn't you put it away carefully in your work-box last night?' asked her mother, 'that is the place for thimbles.'

'Yes, mother, I know; but I took it to show to father, and then he began to tell us stories, and I put it down in my lap and forgot all about it; but I am sure it must be on the table or somewhere.'

'Well, go and look yourself; perhaps it has rolled under the sofa or under the fender.'

Elsie, Bertha, and even little Willie hunted all over the rooms, but no thimble could be found, and at length Elsie came back with a very crestfallen face to say it was nowhere to be seen; the consequence was, she had to sew without a thimble, and her poor little finger suffered accordingly, and the idea of her prize being lost cost her some bitter tears.

When the sewing was over her mother said, 'Now let us get the dinner ready. I will lay the cloth, and you shall bring me the bread, meat, and cheese, Bertha, while Elsie gets the potatoes ready.'

Little Bertha ran to the cupboard, delighted to be of use. 'Here is the bread, mother, now

I will fetch the meat.' This being done, she ran away for the cheese, but her little feet did not patter back as quickly as her mother wished.

'Come, child, make haste, bring the cheese.'

'It's gone, there is none left on the dish,' called back Bertha, her head still in the cupboard.

'Oh yes, it must be there, but perhaps the shelf is too high for you to reach. I will come.'

The mother, however, was not more successful than the child, for no cheese could be seen. The little servant girl was asked, but she could throw no light on the matter, and so they had to sit down to dinner cheeseless. It so happened that the clerk had had a hard morning's work, and was particularly hungry. The allowance of meat was very modest, not sufficient to stay his hunger; and unfortunately, Elsie's attention having been at a critical moment called off from the potatoes to the missing cheese, the former were burnt and dried up.

'Never mind,' said her father, 'there is some nice cheese in the cupboard, I know; we must make up with that.'

The children coloured up and looked at

their mother, who said sorrowfully, 'Something very strange has happened; the cheese has disappeared.'

'Disappeared!' repeated the clerk, striding to the cupboard, 'how can a thing disappear? Do you mean it has been eaten?'

'Indeed I can't say. I only know I put it away last night, and now it is gone.'

Oh how hard the clock tried to tick intelligibly, and how the deal table and chairs longed to jump upon the wicked offender and stamp it to pieces!

'Now this is really too bad,' said the clerk angrily,—he had a hasty temper,—'must I make my dinner off dry bread?'

The children began to cry, but their mother said, 'Of course your father is angry, it is only natural; he works very hard; and a hungry man should not be vexed. You, Elsie, made matters worse by spoiling the potatoes; however, poor child, you have your own little sorrow to bear in losing your thimble, so we must not be hard on you.'

'Lost her thimble? how is that?' asked her father, somewhat mollified by his wife's speech.

'I don't know, father,' whimpered poor little

Elsie, her finger in her mouth. 'I left it down here last night, but to-day it is nowhere to be found.'

'Heart alive!' cried the clerk; 'is there then a thief in the house?'

'Yes, yes, yes,' ticked the clock, straining every nerve to make more noise than usual; and the horse-hair couch panted and bristled, but failed to attract attention, though indeed it would have been of little use if it had done so, as it could hardly have pointed out the culprit.

'Why, the place must be bewitched,' grumbled the clerk. 'I must be off to my work; and I only hope that before I return both cheese and thimble will be found.'

That night there were no stories told or demanded. The children went to bed earlier than usual; for Elsie's head ached with crying for the lost thimble; and little Bertha was tired, and longed to be asleep. The same restless feelings as of the previous night overcame the clerk as he sat in the new arm-chair. At first it seemed so comfortable and restful; then, as the evening wore on, all the comfort and rest gradually disappeared, and it became impossible to sit still a moment.

'Isn't the chair comfortable?' asked his wife anxiously, noticing how often he changed his position.

'Yes—no. I hardly know whether it is the chair or myself; anyhow, I am very restless, so perhaps it will be better to go to bed;' and leaving his newspaper unread, away he went, and his wife, after folding up her work with a sigh, followed. Again, as on the previous night, the chair after many preliminary antics became transformed into a saucy magpie who, with head cocked on one side, perched in front of the clock, chuckling maliciously as it peered up at its grave face. 'Ha! ha! ha! ho! ha! he! no use, old fellow, you can't tell tales of me, try as hard as you may.' Then it turned its thoughts to thieving. There was no more cheese, or indeed much of anything to eat. The bird pecked discontentedly at a bone of meat and made a hole in a fresh loaf of bread, then grumbling and chattering flew round and round in search of something to secrete. Silver spoons and forks were there none, and pewter was not attractive. What could be done? Leaving the lower part of the house, he flew up the staircase, and finding

a door ajar hopped into the room. The moon was shining brightly, and its rays fell upon a silver pencil-case, which lay upon the dressing-table. The magpie pounced upon it in a moment, and seeing at a glance there was nothing more to steal, hopped quietly out of the room and spent the remainder of the night in sleeping.

Next morning when the clerk was dressed he looked round as usual for his pencil-case, but it was nowhere to be seen. At the same moment a cry of dismay arose from Elsie, who was in the kitchen helping the small servant to get the breakfast ready. 'Mother, mother, do come and look at the loaf, there is a big hole in it; who can have done it?'

'And the bone we had at supper last night picked quite clean,' muttered the poor wife, who ran to the cupboard to see what further mischief had been done.

'And when she got there
The cupboard was bare,'

chanted little Bertha, who had been learning Mother Hubbard the day before; but her father told her rather sharply to be quiet; he was puzzled at the state of affairs, and not in a

humour to listen to nursery rhymes. Breakfast over, he sent the children away, and had a serious talk with his wife. It was clear to him that a thief in the house there must be, and who could it be but the little servant girl? There was no one else to suspect, for they were as sure of the children as of themselves. And yet the clerk's wife was loth to think ill of the poor quiet little drudge who had always behaved well, and done her work with a good will. 'Well, but somebody must take the things,' argued the clerk; 'and who else can it be? You must question the girl, perhaps she is in some small trouble. Talk to her very kindly, and tell her if she tells the truth she shall not be punished. Now I must be off to my work.' But the poor little maid-of-all-work had nothing to confess; not a crumb of bread more than was right had she ever taken, and, frightened at being suspected, she sobbed and cried so piteously that her mistress could not believe her anything but innocent. Search was made for the pencil-case, but in vain; and nowhere could Elsie's thimble be found. The clerk was late home that day, and when he returned he was very tired; so, beyond in-

quiring for his pencil-case, he did not refer to what had passed. He went to bed early, put his silver watch under the pillow as usual, but so carelessly that the chain hung down.

The door was left ajar as usual, for the room was small, and there was no fireplace. This night the clerk's wife took the precaution of locking the cupboard where the food was kept. You can therefore understand that there was less than ever for the magpie to pick and steal down-stairs, and so he once more betook himself to the upper regions. The clerk was sleeping heavily, and so was his wife; the moon was again shining brightly, and this time its rays fell on the silver chain which hung from the corner of the pillow. The magpie seized it in its beak, drew out the watch softly, and hopped away with the prey. 'Ke! ke! ko!' this was indeed a prize. But now, where shall he hide it? Small articles, such as thimbles and pencil-cases, are easily disposed of; but this is quite another matter. He thought of the horse-hair couch, but the next moment he felt sure the spiteful thing would not help him to hide it, so he must go

catches his sharp eye; he hops up to it, and, pushing it open, finds himself in the little servant's room. Tired and worn out with crying, she is too sound asleep to hear her enemy enter, and, alas! poor little girl, she does not even awake when, with a malicious chuckle, he pokes the watch into the pocket of her dress, which hangs over the foot of her bed. 'Ki! ki! ko! that will do nicely.' Wicked bird, he has done enough for one night, and can now go down-stairs and sleep.

Well, well, well! There was indeed a commotion in the morning when the clerk discovered his loss, and the watch was found in the maid's room. Storming, fuming, weeping and wailing, there was nothing else to be heard. The poor old sofa agitated its worn-out springs, but could not pant out the truth; the table and chairs' faint creaks were not intelligible, and the clock lifted up its voice in vain. And in the midst of the tumult the false wicked arm-chair sat facing the fire in unruffled serenity. The poor little maid was taken off to prison; the clerk's wife and the children interceded for her in vain,—the clerk was inexorable. 'Who else could have taken the

things?' he asked; 'and was not his watch found in the pocket of her dress? It was nonsense to talk of innocence after that.' The poor little girl cried and begged for mercy, but to no avail, and she was carried off to prison.

That night the clerk's wife resolved to watch and see if in any way she could gain a clue to the strange mystery, for in her heart she could not think the little servant guilty. Her husband went to bed and she did the same, but she determined to keep awake. The door was ajar as usual. About twelve o'clock she heard a light sound on the staircase, which set her heart beating. Sitting up in bed she threw an old shawl over her shoulders, listening attentively to the sound. It came nearer and nearer, there was a rustle and flutter, the door was pushed open, and something large and dark hopped into the room. The poor woman was terrified nearly out of her senses, but she uttered no sound, waiting for what was to come next. As usual the bird hopped up on to the table, and then by the aid of the moon she made out its form and knew it to be a large magpie. Her one thought was to secure it, and creeping noiselessly out of bed she shut-to the door, then called to her hus-

band, 'Wake, wake! here is the thief, you must catch him!'

Up started the clerk, calling out, 'Where? who? what? Did you say the thief? Let me catch him, that's all.'

The bird was now flying round and round the room trying to make its escape, but the door was shut and there was no chimney. He dashed himself against the window, hoping to break the thin glass and fly away, but before he could repeat the attack the clerk had thrown a heavy shawl over him and he was fast a prisoner. 'Open one of these empty drawers, wife, we must shut him up safe till I am dressed. There, my gentleman, you won't get out of that in a hurry. I don't want to hurt you, so you shan't be smothered, but I must find out your history before I've done with you.' His wife, who had finished dressing, said she would go down-stairs and bring up a large covered basket there was in the sitting-room, as she thought the poor thing would breathe in it better than in the drawer. Accordingly she lighted a candle and went down-stairs. Putting the light on the table she sought for and found the basket, and was on the point of

leaving the room when something strange struck her in its aspect; something seemed missing; at first she could not make out what it was, then suddenly she remembered the new arm-chair. What had become of it? It had vanished; not a trace of it remained! Well, of all the mysteries this was the greatest of all. Hurrying up-stairs with the basket, she sank on to a chair and panted out, 'It 's gone!'

'What is gone?' asked her husband.

'The chair, the new arm-chair.'

The magpie heard and chuckled softly.

'Gone! Nonsense; what do you mean? How could a large chair disappear?'

'It has,' said his wife; 'only go down and look for yourself, you will see I am speaking the truth.'

Down rushed the clerk, dashed about the room, into the kitchen, back again, turned his eyes round and round the place, but failed to see what he sought. True it was, as his wife had said, the chair was gone. 'Is the house bewitched?' he gasped out, staring stupidly at the clock's round face, as if expecting an answer; but none coming that he could understand, he rushed up again to his wife in a bewildered state of mind.

The bird was put into the basket, but the clerk's hand got severely pecked during the operation. 'Let us take it down-stairs,' said he, 'and wait there the remainder of the night, for this creature makes such a noise fluttering about I am afraid the children will be awakened.'

They carried the basket below, placed it on the hearth, and sat down feeling utterly upset and bewildered, and as if all that was passing was a perplexing uncomfortable dream. Whence came this great bird? They knew he did not belong to any of their neighbours. Where was the chair? Had that too been stolen? Impossible, for was not this cunning magpie the thief? Watches, thimbles, pencil-cases he might well steal and secrete, but a large arm-chair was quite another thing. No; this was clearly a fresh mystery. 'Oh, why was I so hasty,' thought the poor man, 'as to believe so readily in that poor little girl's guilt, even though my watch was found in her pocket? How she cried and begged for mercy, poor child, and all the time she was innocent!' And he paced up and down the room in an agony of remorse, refusing to listen to the excuses his wife made for him and with which she tried to

comfort him. Meanwhile time was passing; it was close on dawn and the magpie grew more and more restless as the moment approached when he should again resume the form of the arm-chair.

Unheard by the clerk and his wife, who were engrossed by their own thoughts, he pecked and pecked at the string that fastened the basket until it was loosened. Then with his head he pushed up the lid and contrived to hop out of his prison. Just then, however, the couple, attracted by the noise, turned and saw what had happened. They rushed forward to seize the cunning bird, but at that moment the clock struck five, the magpie vanished, and the clerk and his wife fell sprawling into the arms of the new arm-chair. 'Wife!' 'Husband!' For a moment or two this was all they could say, so great was their amazement. What magic was at work? How did the chair get there? Where was the bird? Had they after all only been dreaming, walking in their sleep, and was this the waking up? But no—for there stood the basket in front of the hearth with the loosened string hanging down. Suddenly the wife uttered a cry. In trying to rise from her

very undignified position she placed one hand far back on the seat of the chair. Her hand slipped into a hollowed space under the padding and came upon something small and hard. What was her surprise to draw out Elsie's silver thimble! Then up jumped the clerk. 'Is the chair bewitched?' he cried, and putting in his hand he drew out his lost pencil-case. Not a word was spoken for a moment or two, while he sat and looked at the pencil-case, she at the thimble. Then the wife turned to her husband and said solemnly, 'There is only one thing to be done, let us take back the chair to the old Jew this very day. In some way it is the cause of all our troubles. We will take it back to the man and tell him what has happened. I should like, however, to make him promise not to sell it to any one again.'

Oh! how delighted the clock and chairs and table were to hear this decision. Now they would once more know peaceful times, and be rid of the company of an impostor. As soon as the Court was open the clerk went there, saw the authorities, and cleared the little servant-maid of the accusations against her, brought her home, begged her pardon, and

then with the help of a neighbour carried the arm-chair back to the Jew's shop.

'What, do you want me to buy it back already?' asked the old man.

'I only ask you to *take* it back,' answered the clerk; 'I am content to lose by it; but keep it in my house a night longer I will not,' and he told him what had happened.

'Pish! Stuff and nonsense!' scoffed the old Jew. 'You've been dreaming, sir, you and your good lady. There is something wrong wid de indigestion; black bird always come when dat is wrong. It's a pootiful chair; you couldn't have a more *pootiful* chair, sir. Give him me back if you like, but I make no foolish promise not to shell him again. Old Isaac not such a fool as he looks!'

And do what he would the clerk could not shake this determination. He could therefore only content himself with the resolve to spread the strange story far and near, so that all those in search of furniture might be spared such cares and troubles as he had undergone through becoming the possessor of

THE ENCHANTED CHAIR.

UNDER THE APPLE-TREE.

UNDER THE APPLE-TREE.

BEAUTIFUL was the place that the little sparrow had chosen for its nest, beautiful at least in spring, when the apple-tree, the only fruit-tree in the tailor's little garden, stood laden with blossoms dazzling white as though it had been sprinkled with

[1] This story is adapted from the Danish.

snow. From the bench under the tree came songs and merry prattle, to which the little sparrow, perched on a bough kissed by the rays of the sun, cocked his head on one side and listened.

His small sharp eyes were fixed intently on little Gretchen, who, knitting a stocking, sat listening to her mother's tales. She was so industrious; her knitting-needles flashed like shining bayonets in the sun, and only now and then was there a lost stitch, and then it was soon set right again by her mother.

Little Gretchen was the only child of the poor tailor and his wife. She was the sun of the house, and a bright little sun it was. It never crept behind the clouds. Oh no! it shone upon them and warmed them from morning until night. Even their dreams were tinged with its golden rays.

Two rosy cheeks, a pair of blue eyes, and golden hair which seemed to take delight in curling round her white neck, a blue frock, and a red kerchief pinned over her chest, such was little Gretchen's picture.

'The Lucky Farthing, mother, tell me that, oh do!' She pleaded so prettily that the mother

could not refuse just this one story more. The sparrow chirped his satisfaction.

'Well then,' began her mother, 'one afternoon a little girl was sitting under a great beech-tree by four cross roads eating her solitary meal. It was very frugal, only a morsel of French roll. The weather was cold and gloomy, although it was the middle of summer, and the little girl was cold, for her dress was worn, and she had no stockings on her feet, only a little checked handkerchief tied round her head. The creatures of the wood, the deer with their lively little fawns, passed by her, the squirrels bounded by, and the birds flew from bough to bough, finding shelter under the green leaves. But they did not take any notice of her, poor little solitary being.

'And the clouds? Ah! perhaps they were sailing towards her home over the sea, over the mountains, to the land of roses, oranges, and rich vineyards, while she sat alone and shivered under the great beech-tree. Suddenly she heard the sound of voices, and her eyes fell upon a merry party coming towards her. Ah! perhaps they will give her a copper. She put down her last morsel of bread, and

picking up her concertina from the grass began to play.

'"The little one is very pretty," said a gentleman, "more so than her music.—Come, play us something cheerful."

'"Tell us your name," cried a little golden-haired girl, with large, merry, friendly eyes.

'The small musician shook her head. She did not understand a word, and she went on playing sadly.

'"Oh! that is too tiresome to listen to," said the gentleman, throwing a copper on the grass, and turning away. But the child with the merry friendly eyes took out of her little red silk purse a bright new farthing (it was her lucky farthing) and laid it in her lap.

'A smile broke over the little musician's face, and she thanked the giver with her dark gazelle-like eyes.

'"Do you know of what she was thinking when she was playing?" said the little girl to her mother, as she tripped along.

'"No, my child, what do you suppose she was thinking about?"

'"She was wishing that her mother was with her, and that she had a doll to come home to,

when it grew dark in the wood. So I gave her my farthing, for you told me it would bring luck."

'The mother kissed her little darling tenderly, and wished she had taken more notice of the poor Italian, who once more sat alone playing her sad tunes.

'She had not much skill, but there was a touching expression in her notes. Once more steps approached her, and this time it was a little dark-haired boy with brown cheeks and bare neck who stood before her. Upon one shoulder sat a little monkey, with a red cap on its head, and a brass chain round its neck, while from the other shoulder hung a mandoline.

'"Good-day, Marietta."

'The little girl sprang up, and her cheeks became warm with the joy that had suddenly found its way to her. For Nicolo, who now stood before her, had come from the same village as herself. He was her best friend and playfellow, and she had not the slightest idea that he had come to this country.

'"Father is dead," said Nicolo, "and mother told me I must feed myself, for she had quite enough to do to find bread for all the little

ones. So I caught this little creature; and, you may believe me, he makes some fun.—Quick, little monkey,—one, two, three!"

'Down scampered the little monkey, made a bow with his red hat, and while the boy played the mandoline, danced and jumped about, turned a somersault on the grass, and twisted himself round like a top, making Marietta laugh with all her heart.

'"Now," said Nicolo, "we will keep together, and by-and-bye we shall get rich, then we will go home and buy rich Carlo's house with the vineyard."

'"Yes, let us," and Marietta's eyes shone like brilliant stars. What was there left to wish for? Had she not lively Nicolo, the monkey, the mandoline, and her own concertina? Oh! Marietta was no longer poor or alone.

'Many years after this Nicolo and Marietta lived in their own beautiful warm country, he as husband, she as wife. They had their own house and farm, and a cluster of fine boys and girls.

'When Marietta sat among her little ones and wished particularly to delight them, she would tell them about their father's and mother's

wanderings in the foreign land. The great hill near the wood where the tents stood in a row, and where the bear danced with a stick while father's little monkey jumped to the sound of the trumpets, all this they knew as well as though they had been there and seen it for themselves.

'But above all did they delight in hearing of the great beech-tree by the four cross roads, where mother sat sad and solitary, and of the little girl with the large merry eyes, for from her their mother had received the lucky farthing, the same that now shone on the gold chain round her neck.

'The unknown giver to them was still the little child described by their mother; they forgot that if alive she must now be a woman; and when saying their prayers at their mother's knee these words would often fall from their lips: "And God bless the little girl with the large merry eyes."

'And now that I have told you your favourite story you must sing me a little song, and then we will go in-doors and make up the fire for father's tea,—will you?' asked the mother of Gretchen.

Little Gretchen nodded her head as though she would shake off her golden curls, and began to sing,—

'So hear now what the busy bee
Can of itself relate :—

Where roses bloom and blush
In bright and crimson flush,
There sweets and dew I crush.
Buzz! buzz!

When tired of transit fleet,
And tasting all things sweet,
To home I then retreat.
Buzz! buzz!

All beauty is for me,
Honey and growth so free,
The roses give to me.
Buzz! buzz!

When roses have gone by,
And cold gloom meets the eye,
Forgotten here I lie.
Buzz! buzz!

But who gives thee sweet store,
And light within thy door,
When roses bloom no more?
Buzz! buzz!'

There was something so touching in the child's voice, especially in the last verse, that her mother's eyes filled with tears. Then they rose from the bench and went in-doors. But the sparrow still sat upon the bough with his

beak buried in the feathers of his breast and meditated profoundly over the last words—

'But who gives thee sweet store,
And light within thy door,
When roses bloom no more?
Buzz! buzz!'

It perched afterwards upon the eaves, then peeped through the gilded panes into the tailor's little room, and then it knew, as well as the sun's rays, that nothing in the whole wide world, so far at least as his experience went, was half so pretty as the tailor's little Gretchen.

THE END.

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